

G/R

PLANETFALL: Outside Package

Date: 4/25/83

Number: INF3-203

Page: 5

Limited Warranty: Infocom, Inc., provides a 90-day limited warranty for its products. For a complete warranty statement, please see the instruction manual enclosed in this package.

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Printed in U.S.A.

G/R Copy

Giardini/Russell Inc., 100 Galen Street, Watertown, MA 02172, 617-926-5030

Client: Infocom

Date: 5/10/83

Title: PLANETFALL Packaging

Number: INF3-203

I.D. BADGE

(Front)

STELLAR PATROL

Special Assignment Task Force

6172-531-541

(Back)

Authorized Signature

Ensign 7/C

Rank

02-48.5.861

Date of Issuance

This card is issued solely for YOUR SAFETY AND CONVENIENCE, and any attempt to bend, fold, spindle, or otherwise mutilate said card is PUNISHABLE BY DEATH.



Giardini/Russell Inc., 100 Galen Street, Watertown, MA 02172, 617-926-5030

INFOCOM MEETING AGENDA

May 10, 1983 At G/R

Planetfall - 3:15

- Approval on outside package copy.
- Approval on ID Card
- Approval on postcards
- Approval on estimate

Adventure/Pyramid - 4:00

- Demo

G/R

Date: 5/16/83

Number: INF3-203

Page: 2

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G/R

Date: 5/16/83

Number: INF3-203

Page: 3

Rignu Beskonides, V.P., D.D.I.

Signed

Odis Phlyk, C.A.D.I.A. Commissioner
Countersigned

Zigmo Parcheesi, Chief, B.R.S./P.R./F.T.
Counter-countersigned

(Right side)

Enclosure II

This enclosure must contain:

1. Official Third Galactic Union documents
2. Classified Stellar Patrol mission profiles

This enclosure may contain:

1. Stellar Patrol service records
2. Medical information
3. Transfer papers

This enclosure must not contain:

1. Unauthorized recreational items
2. Extraneous materials, i.e., magnetic briefing disks
3. Personal effects of any kind

Failure to comply with the above regulations is punishable by the loss of not less than one appendage.

G/R

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Slot "A": Magnetic Briefing Disk

This slot to hold magnetic briefing disk only. Any other materials found in this slot will be confiscated, and the owner will be automatically subjected to 25,000 volts of Social Re-orientation Therapy.

(Captions for disk instructions)

Protect

Protégez

Thrmp'frblungik

10°C--52°C

50°F--125°F

151°Q--250000°Q

Insert carefully

Inserez avec soin

Jmboog*lak-oopxidazi

Never

Jamais

Nidni'nradni*nikniknik

G/R

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No

Non

Phrukalukkalukka*nik'niknik

Never

Jamais

Nidni'nradni*nikniknik

Slot "B": Identification Badge

This slot to hold Red-and-Green Divisional Identification Badge.

Red-and-Yellow Regimental Identification Badge must be kept on your person at all times. Failure to do so will be met with the sternest punishment allowed under military law, i.e., immediate reclassification to Special Assignment Task Force duty for duration of enlistment.

G/R Copy

Giardini/Russell Inc., 100 Galen Street, Watertown, MA 02172, 617-926-5030

Client: Infocom

Date: 6/25/83

Title: PLANETFALL Direct Mail

Number: INF3-367

(NEBULON Post card--back)

NEBULON--The quaint and colorful inhabitants of this grand old planet are sure to "worm their way into the hearts of visiting tourists.

PLANETFALLTM Novelties by Infocom, Inc., 55 Wheeler St., Cambridge, MA 02138, Earth Sol System

©1983 Infocom, Inc.

SOUVENIR POSTCARD

Your Stamp Here

(Handwritten copy)

Fellow Dealer--

The natives here are going heads-over-heads about PLANETFALL, the great new science fiction comedy from Infocom. Ever since I got my shipment in, the store's been as crowded as an asphalt road on a rainy day!

G/R

Date: 6/25/83

Number: INF3-367

Page: 2

Take it from me--stock up on PLANETFALL, and the world will squirm
a path to your door!

(P.S. Stop by next time you're in the sector--I'll take you out
nightcrawling around the discos. These Nebuloids really know how
to writhe!)

INFOCOM-DEALING LIFE FORM

U.S.A.

EARTH

SOL SYSTEM

(Accardi-3 Post card--back)

THE FABULOUS ACCARDI-3 BELT

Name your pleasure! From Sphyconian slime races to robot-taxi joyrides
on Benjamin's Folly to the exotic anatomical charms of the Gabrillic
Hyphenated Woman, a hundred worlds and a thousand thrills await you
throughout "The Galaxy's Playground".

PLANETFALLTM Novelties by Infocom, Inc.

55 Wheeler St., Cambridge, MA 02138, Earth, Sol System

G/R

Date: 6/25/83

Number: INF3-367

Page: 3

©1983 Infocom, Inc.

POSTCARD

Your Stamp Here

(Handwritten copy)

Bet you thought you'd never hear from me again!

Listen, if things on Earth are anything like they are out here, you'd best stock up on Infocom's new smash hit space farce PLANETFALL. Ever since this PLANETFALL craze hit the Belt, no one's set foot in a single video casino or electro-massage parlor. They're all staying home playing PLANETFALL! I haven't seen anything like this since the day the Accardian spaceship kidnapped me right out of my cockpit!!

Best wishes--

Amelia Earhart

EARTHLING INFOCOM DEALER

U.S.A.

EARTH

SOL SYSTEM

G/R

Date: 6/25/83

Number: INF3-367

Page: 4

(Ramos II Post card--back)

RAMOS II, WHERE YESTERYEAR LIVES ON

The "Circuit of the Double Suns" has something for every nostalgic soul:
genuine rocketship rides, ancient Plutonium Age battlefields, even
old-fashioned mutant hunting.

PLANETFALL™ Novelties by Infocom, Inc. 55 Wheeler St., Cambridge, MA 02138
Earth Sol System

© 1983 Infocom, Inc.

THE INFOCOM™ CARD

Your Stamp Here

(Handwritten copy)

GREETiNKS, HUMANOID!

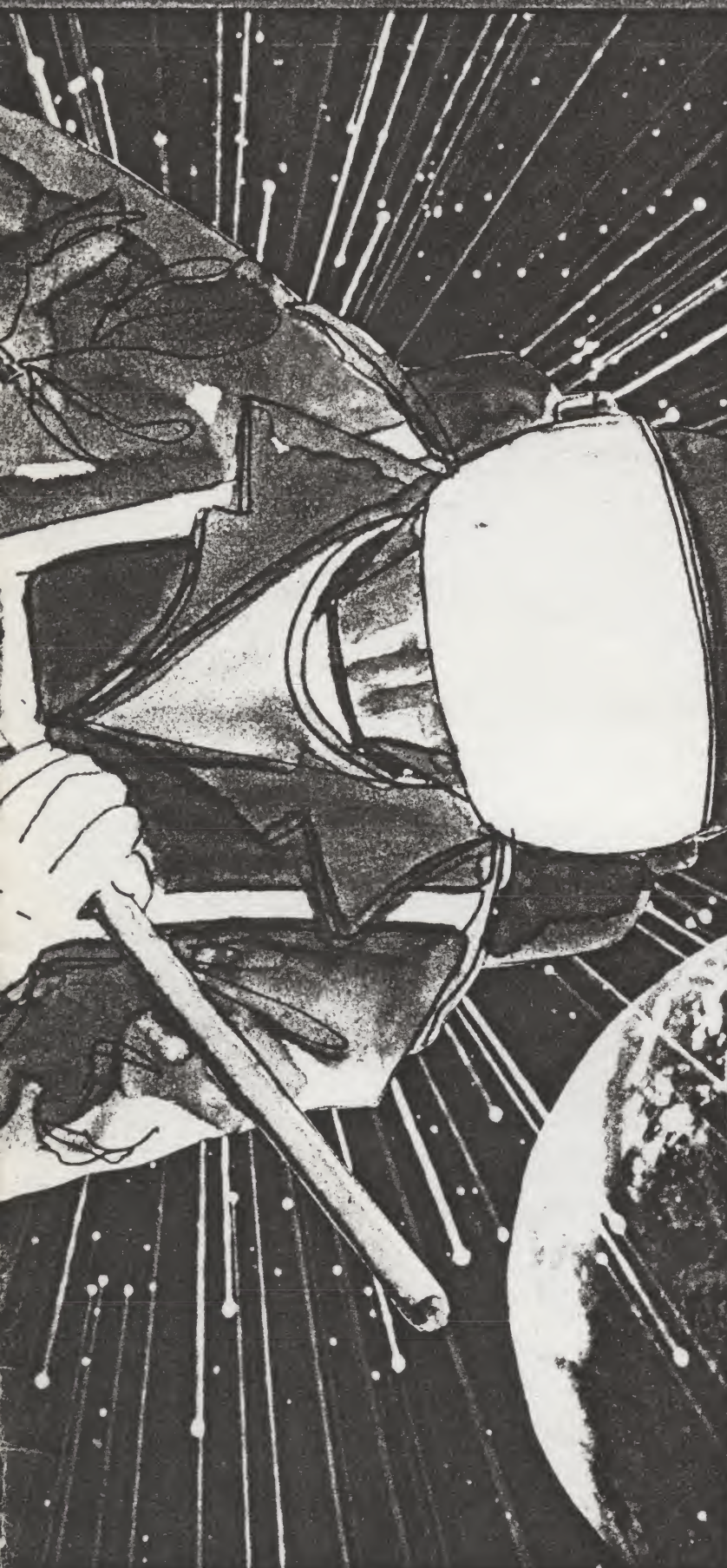
WE MUTANTS AM FREE At LAST!--MUTANT HUNTIRS ALL 2 BiZZY PLAYiNK PLANETFALL,
NU SCi Fi LAFF CLASSIK FROM iNFOCOM. NOW WE EXCAPE, COME SEE U, WANT 2 BUY
R OWN PLANETFALLS. PLEEZ STOCK UP 16 BiLLYUN NOW--

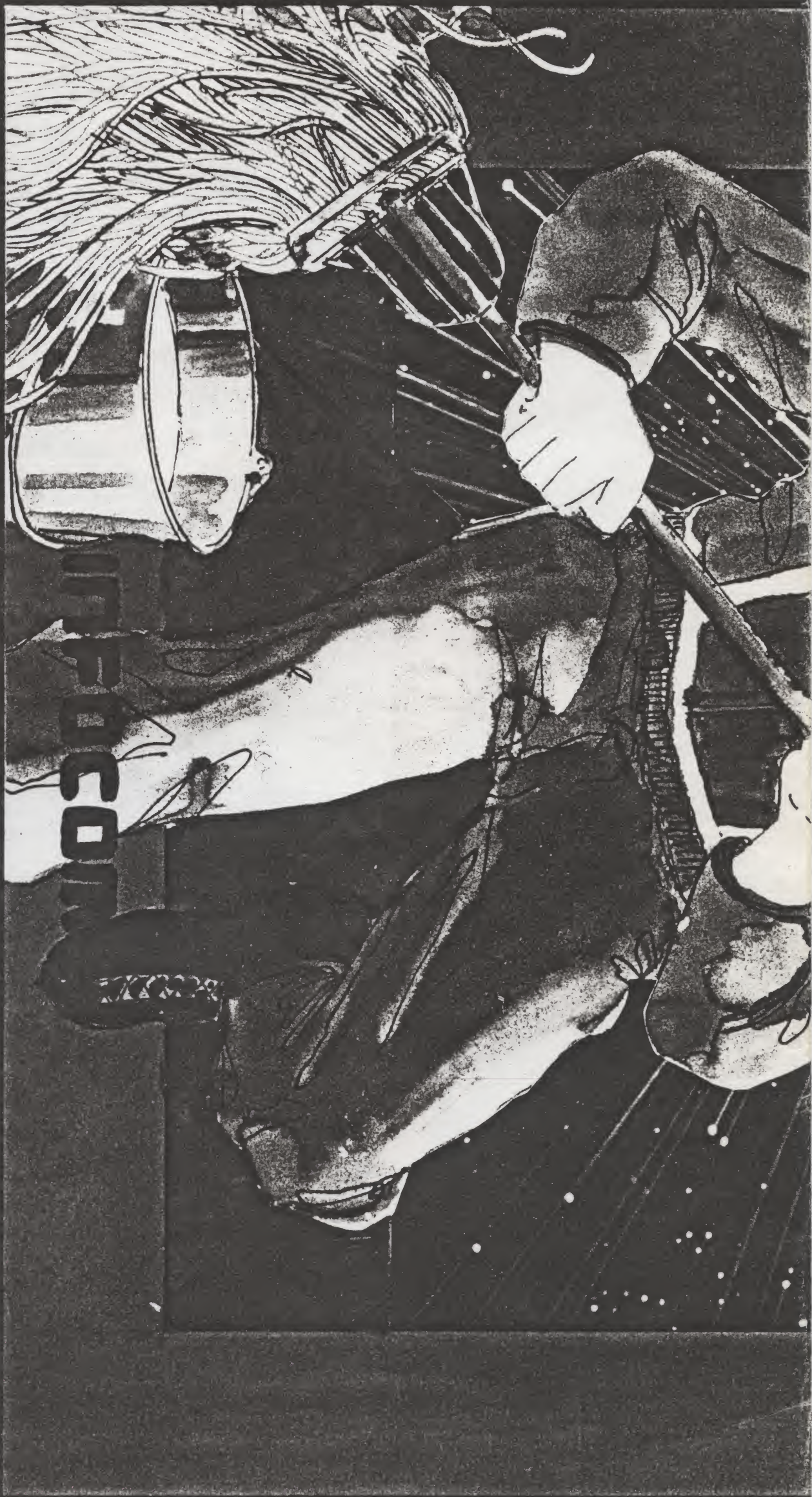
US

R FREND
EARTH
SOL SiSTEM

STELLER PATROL: SPECIAL ASSIGNMENT FORCE
But even your expert technical training
won't save you now

PLANETVAL



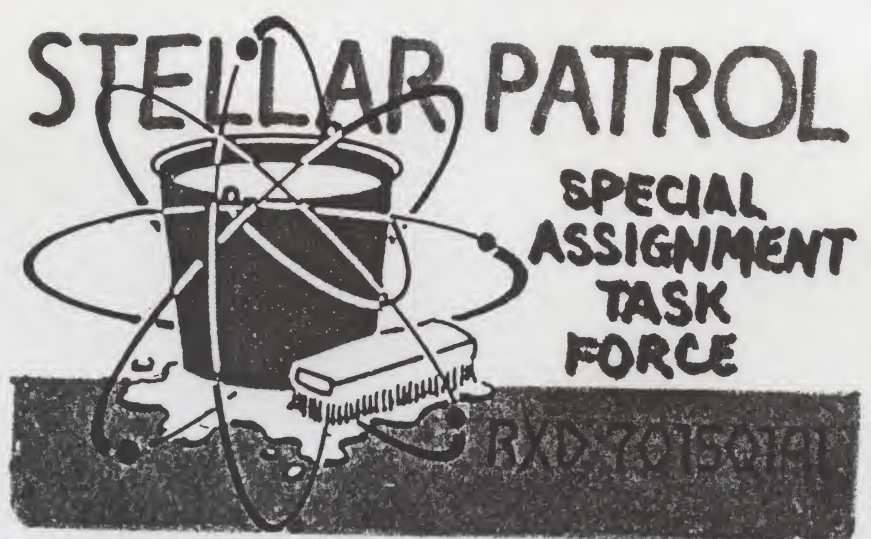


IT'S NOT JUST A JOB.
IT'S AN ADVENTURE!





INFOCOM



G/R Conference Report

Giardini/Russell Inc., 100 Galen Street, Watertown, MA 02172, 617-926-5030

Client:	Infocom	Date:	4/6/83
Report by:	S. Breckenridge	Conference Date:	4/8/83
Place:	Infocom	Client copies to:	J. Berez/M. Berlyn/M. Blank/ S. Galley/S. Meretzky
Present for client:	M. Berlyn/M. Blank/ S. Galley/S. Meretzky	Agency copies to:	Sally/Allan/Eric/David
Present for agency:	S. Breckenridge		

Attention | Client/Agency met to discuss:

1. Witness
2. Redesign of Warranty Cards
3. Planetfall
4. Adventure I
5. Enchantor
6. Planetfall Disk Stickers

1. Witness (INF2-359)

Client signed mechanicals for:

- Manual cover (artwork and type).
- Outside package/wrapcard (two illustrations and type).
- Matchbook.

2. Redesign of Warranty Cards (INF3-098)

Client gave Agency approximately 100 owner warranty cards for analysis.

3. Planetfall (INF3-203)

Agency presented recommended layout on Planetfall logo as well as non-recommended alternatives. Client approved recommended version.

4. Adventure I (INF3-201)

Client to provide plot synopsis 4/15 at 3:00. Client to show first demo at 3:00 on 5/2/83.

G/R Conference Report

Giardini/Russell Inc., 100 Galen Street, Watertown, MA 02172, 617-926-5030

Client: Infocom
Report by: Page 2
Place:
Present for client:

Date: 4/8/83
Conference Date:
Client copies to:

Present for agency:

Agency copies to:

Attention

5. Enchantor (INF3-202)

Client to provide plot synopsis at 4:00 on 4/7. Client to show Agency first demo on 4/22.

6. Planetfall Disk Stickers (INF3-357)

Agency delivered mechanicals.

G/R Conference Report

Giardini/Russell Inc., 100 Galen Street, Watertown, MA 02172, 617-926-5030

Client:	Infocom	Date:	4/13/83
Report by:	S. Breckenridge	Conference Date:	4/15/83
Place:	Infocom	Client copies to:	M. Berlyn/J. Berez/M. Blank/ S. Meretsky/E. Zissman
Present for client:	M. Berlyn/J. Berez/M. Blank/ S. Meretsky/E. Zissman	Agency copies to:	Sally/Allan/Eric/David
Present for agency:	S. Breckenridge/D. Haskell/ E. Nord		

Attention

Client/Agency met to discuss:

1. Planetfall
2. Witness
3. Zork Books
4. Award-Winning Game Stickers
5. Updated Standard Game Descriptions
6. Other

1. Planetfall (INF3-203)

Agency presented copy and layout on folder, ID card, and postcards. Client/Agency discussed various concept concerns. Client/Agency agreed to present revised layouts and copy week of 4/18/83.

2. Witness (INF2-359)

Client signed mechanicals for manual with two changes:

- Change placement of footnote on Page 3.
- Use consistent capital first letters on reference card.

G/R Conference Report

Giardini/Russell Inc., 100 Galen Street, Watertown, MA 02172, 617-926-5030

Client: Infocom
Report by: Page 2

Place:

Present for client:

Present for agency:

Date: 4/15/83

Conference Date:

Client copies to:

Agency copies to:

Attention

3. Zork Books (INF3-237)

Client/Agency reviewed input which Harriet McDougall had given Agency. Client/Agency agreed to proceed; Agency to develop copy and layout.

4. Award-Winning Game Stickers (INF3-094)

Agency left behind sample packages for placement purposes.

5. Updated Standard Game Descriptions (INF3-239)

Agency presented revision. Client approved Witness section, but requested complete Planetfall description rather than short reference. Agency also to pick up Suspended section.

6. Other

a. Agency picked up sample suspended packages.

b. Agency delivered ideal schedule for future games.

G/R Conference Report

Giardini/Russell Inc., 100 Galen Street, Watertown, MA 02172, 617-926-5030

Client:	Infocom	Date:	5/18/83
Report by:	S. Breckenridge	Conference Date:	5/17/83
Place:	Infocom	Client copies to:	J. Berez/M. Dornbrook/ S. Meretzky/E. Zissman
Present for client:	J. Berez/E. Zissman	Agency copies to:	Sally/Allan/Eric/David
Present for agency:	S. Breckenridge/D. Haskell/ E. Nord		

Attention

Client/Agency met to discuss:

1. Planetfall
2. Zork Books
3. Deadline Photo Reprints
4. Other

1. Planetfall (INF3-203)

Agency presented copy and layout on manual, diary and folder.

Next Steps

- a. Client to respond with copy comments on 5/19 or 5/20.
- b. Client approved illustrations. Agency to proceed.
- c. Client/Agency discussed package sizes:

<u>Game</u>	<u>Size of Package (width/height/thickness)</u>
Atari	8 5/8" x 11" x 1 1/4"
Zork (5" disk)	6 3/8" x 10"
Zork (8" disk)	9 3/8" x 9 1/2"
Deadline/Witness	11 7/8" x 10 1/8"
Suspended	9 3/8" x 12 1/2" x 2 13/16"

Client/Agency agreed that Planetfall, Enchanter, Zork Enhancement Kit and other new games will have final measurements of 9 3/8" x 12 1/2".

Sally

- d. Agency to confirm approval by Dysan or CPT on reproducing art.
- e. Client informed Agency of end date change. Materials now due at Research Packaging July 15 for an on-shelf date of August 15.

G/R Conference Report

Giardini/Russell Inc., 100 Galen Street, Watertown, MA 02172, 617-926-5030

Client: Infocom
Report by: Page 2
Place:
Present for client:
Present for agency:

Date: 5/18/83
Conference Date:
Client copies to:
Agency copies to:

Attention

2. Zork Books (INF3-237)

Client signed mechanical. Agency to send to Harriet McDougall.

3. Deadline Photo Reprints (INF3-553)

Agency to order 100 reprints of Deadline photo (after confirming with PR which photos are available). Client approved estimate of \$200.

4. Other

- a. Client to forward to Agency a shipping carton of assembled Witnesses as soon as possible.
- b. Agency delivered final copy on the mailgrams (INF3-572).
- c. Client/Agency agreed to meet 5/19 at 9:30.

G/R Conference Report

Giardini/Russell Inc., 100 Galen Street, Watertown, MA 02172, 617-926-5030

Client: Infocom	Date: 5/31/83
Report by: S. Breckenridge	Conference Date: 5/27/83
Place: Infocom	Client copies to: J. Berez/E. Brogmus/ M. Dornbrook/S. Meretzky
Present for client: S. Meretzky (part time)/E. Brogmus (part time)	Agency copies to: Sally/Allan
Present for agency: S. Breckenridge	

Attention

Client/Agency met to discuss:

1. Planetfall
2. Production

1. Planetfall (INF3-203)

Agency presented revised copy on manual and diary. Client requested that last entry of diary should refer to deck 9. Client will discuss internally. Agency seeking final copy 5/31/83.

2. Production

- a. Agency informed Client that Enchanter Disk Sticker (INF3-360) mechanicals will be late (originally requested for 5/31/83) due to fluctuations in game name.
- b. Agency alerted Client that Enchanter Outside Compatibility Stickers (INF3-359) copy will need to change as game name changes. Agency delivered copy for "Enchanter" (no "I").
- c. Agency requested Infidel Disk Sticker copy input/inventory numbers late in week of 5/31/83.
- d. Agency informed Client that 23,000 revised red file folder labels will be delivered 6/3/83. At that time, Client should dispose of incorrectly printed labels (delivered 5/25/83).

SCREENING ROOM

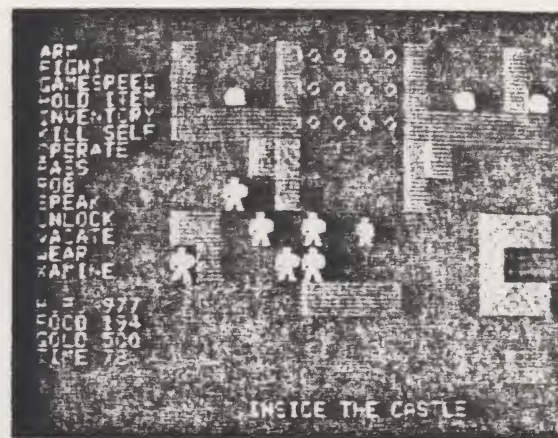
RATING GAME

Though you begin the game as a pathetic little wimp, you can boost your character by playing different "games" and accomplishing various tasks. To increase your intelligence points, for example, you can play a mind-teasing puzzle. To increase your dexterity, there's a target-shooting game. These are a first in role-playing games because they allow your actual physical and mental capabilities to be added to your character.

All of your actions are controlled through the keyboard or with a joystick (for movement and menu selections). As you scroll through the land of Questron, you'll encounter a tremendous variety of creatures. Some of them are friendly and will of-

fer to trade with you. Others are deadly, so armor and weapons are necessary. To obtain these, you have to enter towns, cathedrals, and castles. Upon entering, the screen switches to a close-up of a floor plan in which you can move to specific shops or areas to get necessary items.

Though similar to the *Ultima* series, there are many important differences. *Questron* has a greater number and variety of monsters, and some are vulnerable to certain weapons. Also, in *Questron* you have to complete two quests instead of just one. Your first is to achieve knight-hood by accomplishing various tasks (such as killing monsters). On your second quest you travel to the Land of Evil and defeat

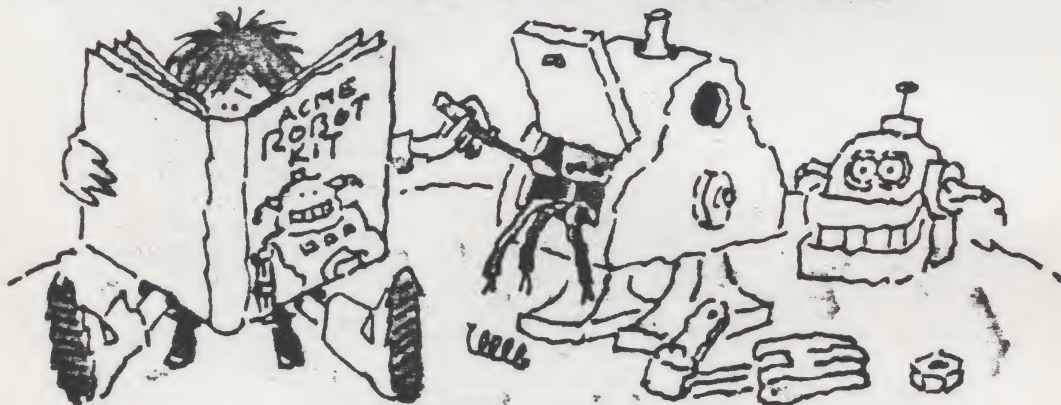


the terrible wizard Mantor.

One special point in the game worth emphasizing is the grand finale. I won't give it away, but it really puts other games to shame. It's something to look forward to. It's about time someone thought of giving the player a nice reward after spending so much time and effort on a game.

PETER COCKCROFT, 15
New York, New York

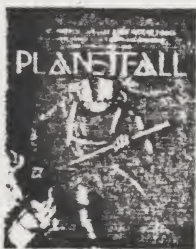
HOW TO MAKE FRIENDS ON OTHER PLANETS



First, go to another planet. (That's easy if you're traveling through space in *PLANETFALL*, the great science fiction comedy from Infocom's interactive fiction line.)

Next, find a robot nobody's using. Then, to make him start up, type in your command: **TURN ON THE MULTIPLE PURPOSE ROBOT...** You've just made a robot friend who'll follow you anywhere.

And you'll be glad you have a faithful follower—there's no telling what will happen next in *PLANETFALL*. Because, like all of Infocom's interactive fiction, *PLANETFALL*'s designed



so that whatever you choose to do affects what will happen next. And there'll be plenty happening—it's an adventure filled with everything from dread diseases to mutant monsters, and it can last for weeks or even months.

Get the closest thing on a disk to really going into outer space. Get *PLANETFALL**. It's not just a great adventure—it's a great way to make friends!

INFOCOM™

*It's compatible with almost every popular home computer. *PLANETFALL* is a trademark of Infocom, Inc.

SEASTALKER ✓

Reviewed on Apple, 48K (disk). Also available for Atari, 48K (disk); Commodore 64 (disk); IBM PC/PCjr, 64K (disk); TRS-80 Models III/4, 48K (disk). Infocom, Inc., 55 Wheeler St., Cambridge, MA 02138; (617) 492-1031. \$39.95

GRAPHICS:	N/A
EXCITEMENT:	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
ORIGINALITY:	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
EASE OF USE:	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
CHALLENGE:	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
SHELF LIFE:	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>

Ever since the world was first thrilled by the exploits of Captain Nemo in Jules Verne's *20,000 Leagues Under the Sea*, the ocean depths have been the

Mike
SEM

Please give me your
comments ASAP
(Thurs. a.m.?)

~~Haste~~
~~Jon~~

G/R Copy

Giardini/Russell Inc., 100 Galen Street, Watertown, MA 02172, 617-926-5030

How can the illustrations be enlarged when the booklet is going from 8x11 to 7x9?

Client: Infocom

Date: June 26, 1984

Title: Outline for Browsie for PLANETFALL

Number: INFP4-758

Overview

The PLANETFALL Browsie will be a recruitment brochure for the Stellar Patrol. There will be eight pages including the front and back covers.

Front Cover

Remains as is on existing Stellar Patrol brochure.

First Spread

Retain existing headline "The Patrol's looking for a few good organisms."

Enlarge space vehicle illustration. Center illustration.

Retain copy that begins with "When the Third Galactic Union....here's a great place to start." Delete all technical/instructional copy.

Add approximately one column of copy. This copy will focus on the qualifications an individual should have to gain entry into the Stellar Patrol.

Stellar Patrol is more navy-ish than army-ish. How about cadet?

Sample Copy:

"To be accepted into the Stellar Patrol was like a dream come true", says

Private 4th ^{Class Darrell} ~~Star~~ Plintiv. Many young people, such as Private Plintiv, credit the Stellar Patrol with changing their lives. But before we agreed to rescue young Plintiv from life as an astroturf farmer on Tupermoon, we looked at his potential, his ability, [his willingness to look the other way - not when crossing the street, either, if you know what we mean...] I don't get it

add first name

In general, this browse should reflect the "universe" the game is set in... third galactic union, stellar patrol's mission to unite the shreds of human civilization left over from the 2nd G.U., etc.
[see attached] ¹²

G/R

Date: June 26, 1984

Number: INFP4-758

Page: 2

Second Spread

Headline will read "Learn valuable skills and explore the Galaxy."

Enlarge person floating in space illustration. Retain copy that begins with "Sure, you'll get a paycheck.....you can learn in the patrol." Delete all technical/instructional copy. Add approximately 2 columns of copy.

This copy will focus on the skills that can be learned in the Stellar Patrol. Also covered are the travel opportunities that await you in the Patrol. The Patrol's reason for existence will be re-iterated.

Sample Copy

It's not just a job, it's a way to repay your Double Fanucci debts.

As a member of the Stellar Patrol, your opportunities are endless.

Well, almost.... Naturally, we will expect something in return for all that we can offer you. We expect a commitment. And a small weekly donation to our favorite charity, The Burble Boys Fund. And a promise that you'll never sell Galactic top secret information without checking with us first....

Third Spread

Headline to be determined. Will reflect job opportunities (currently available) within the Stellar Patrol. Enlarge illustration of soldier. Retain copy that begins "You may start out at.....that heel could be you."

Delete all technical/instructional copy. Add approximately 2 1/2 columns of copy. This copy will focus on job opportunities currently offered to members of the Stellar Patrol. Also covered is what to expect from boot camp (which ties in with the opening line, "You may start out at the bottom....")

Sample Copy

Great Jobs available. No experience necessary. All you need is a shovel.

There are so many terrific jobs available in the Stellar Patrol, too many

I don't like this. It's silly. A recruitment brochure would never say things like this.

this is from zork - OK? actually, it 1st appeared in Planetfall!

G/R

Date: June 26, 1984

Number: INFP4-758

Page: 3

to tell you about here. Here's a brief rundown of what's currently available:

GROTCH FEEDER- This position requires an understanding of the habits and social customs of the grotch. It also requires a mask and a release signed by your next of kin.

Back Cover

No Illustration. Back cover is a questionnaire --written by the Stellar Patrol, to be filled in by possible recruits (consumers). This will give the consumer even more of a hands-on relationship with Planetfall. Headline will be a bold, gutsy question, a la, "Do you have what it takes to be one of the few, the proud, the Stellar Patrol?"

A brief intro paragraph will tout the Patrol as highly selective--truly an exemplary group only interested in extraordinary recruits. Then a questionnaire will follow with questions bordering on the idiotic. This will strike a humorous balance between how the Patrol sees itself and how its entry criteria does not reflect this so-called drive for excellence.

Sample Copy If you can answer these questions, you may qualify for the Patrol:

Have you finished high school or do you know someone who has? _____

Do you have a favorite color? _____

Do you have any of the following diseases that might prevent you from saluting or shouting "Yessir?" a. Hoof-in-Mouth Disease _____

b. Limb Orbit Syndrome _____

c. Gravitational Viral Infection _____

I don't think they'd list a job that there was only one opening for....

You mean last page of brochure? let's hope so...

POSITION LED

? synopsis

mission & synopsis

7/1/84

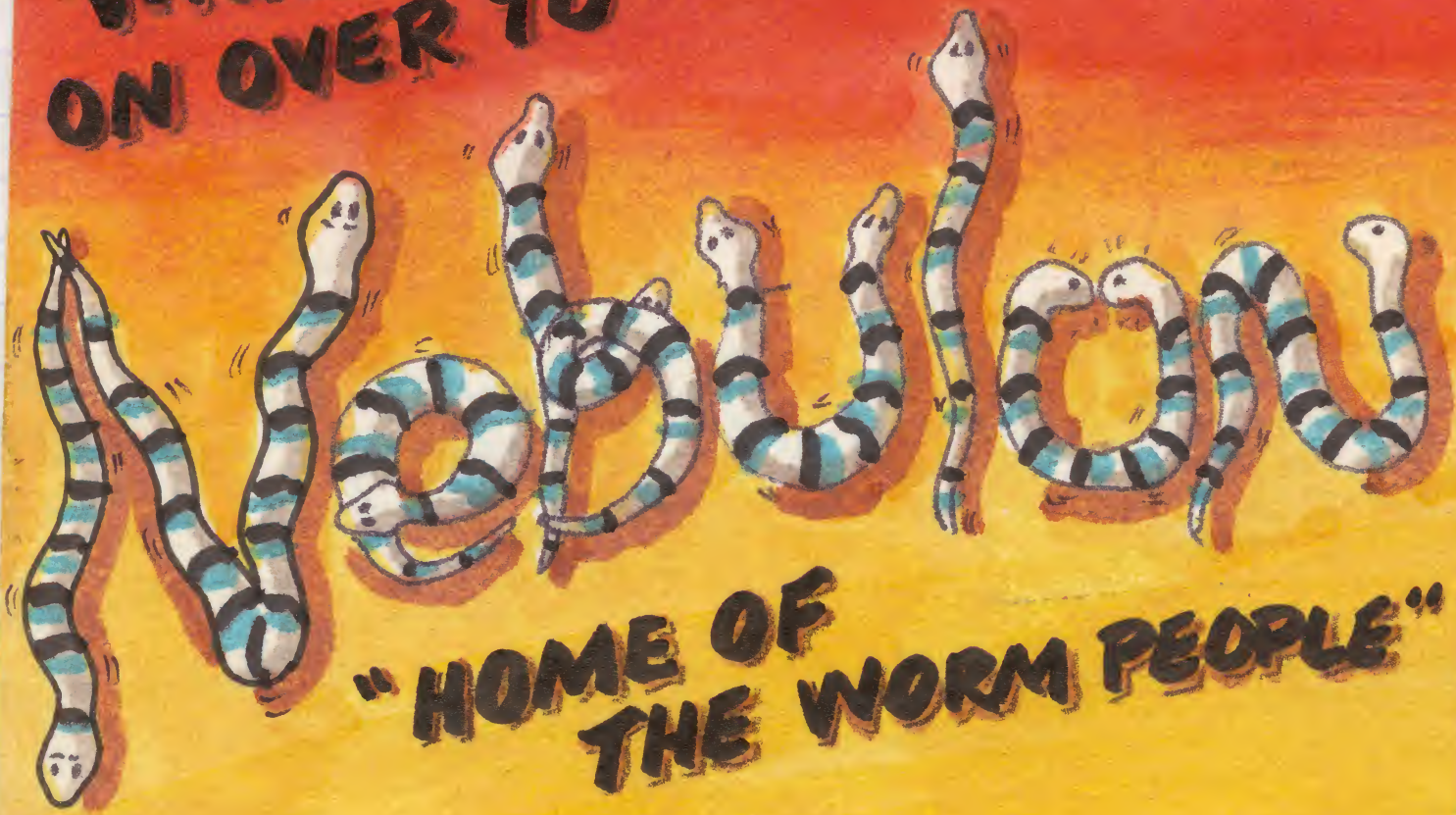




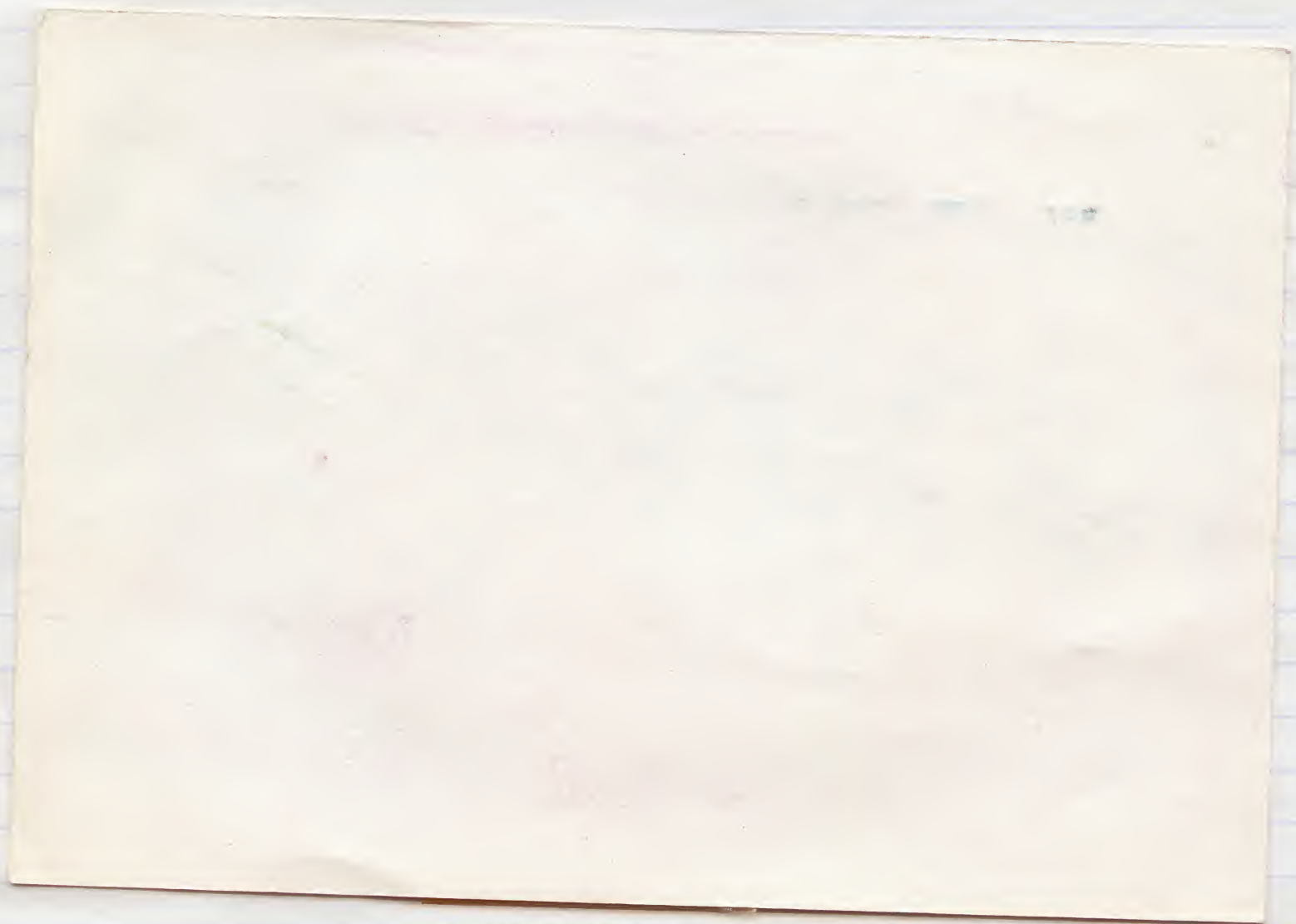
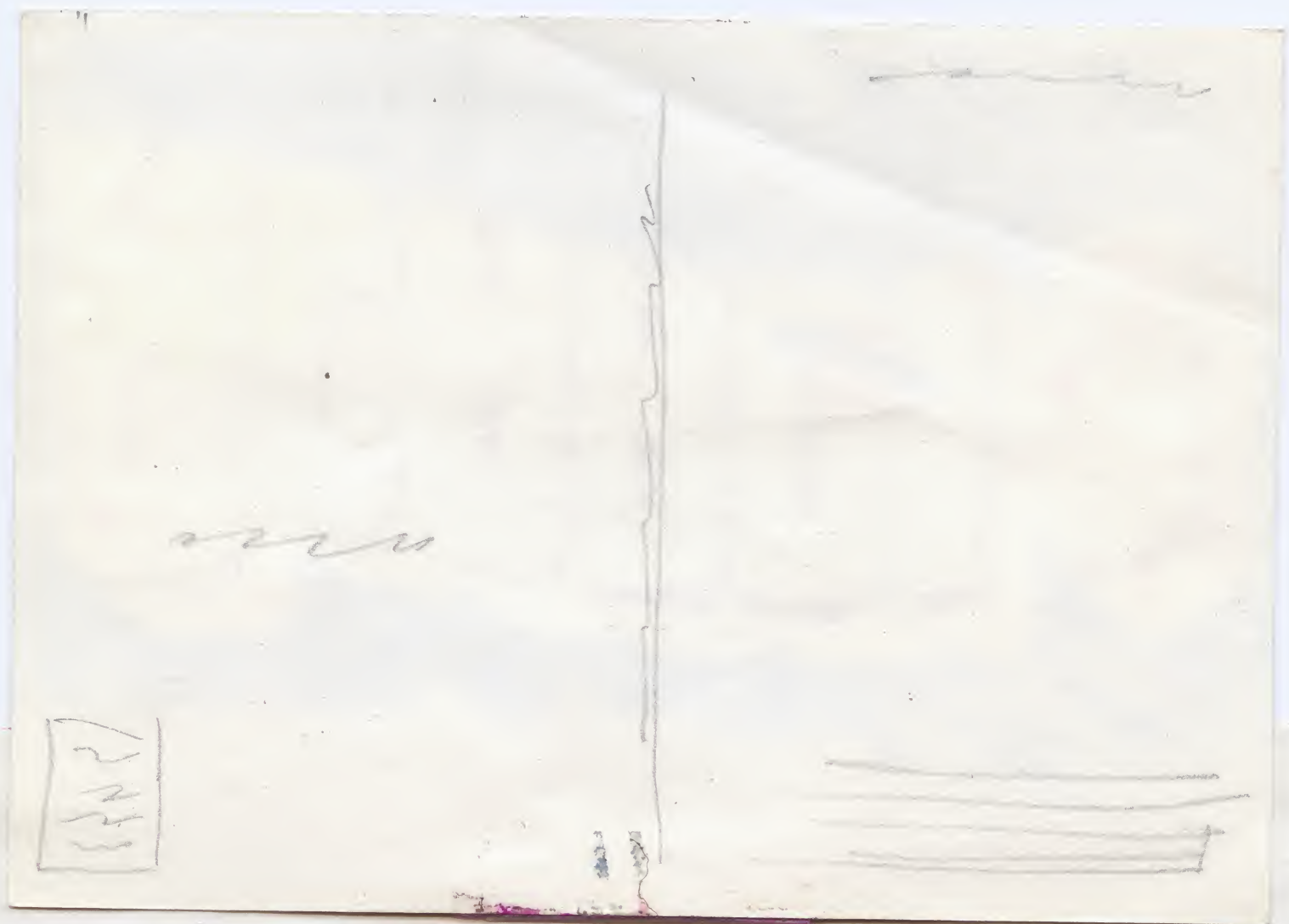
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K17223/566.072
MESSAGE CODE NUMBER
EXTENSION PAGE
AUTHORIZED SIGNATURE

Greetings from

WRIGGLE
ON OVER TO



**"HOME OF
THE WORM PEOPLE"**



NEBULON - The quaint and colorful inhabitants of this grand old planet are sure to "worm" their way into the hearts of visiting tourists.

FELLOW DEALER -

THE NATIVES HERE ARE GOING HEADS- OVER - HEADS ABOUT PLANETFALL, THE GREAT NEW SCIENCE-FICTION COMEDY FROM INFOCOM. EVER SINCE I GOT MY SHIPMENT IN, THE STORE'S BEEN AS CROWDED AS AN ASPHALT ROAD ON A RAINY DAY!

TAKE IT FROM ME - STOCK UP ON PLANETFALL, AND THE WORLD WILL SQUIRM A PATH TO YOUR DOOR!

(P.S. - STOP BY NEXT TIME YOU'RE IN THE SECTOR - I'LL TAKE YOU OUT NIGHTCRAWLING AROUND THE DISCOS. THESE NEBULOIDS REALLY KNOW HOW TO WRITHE!)

Planetfall™ Novelties by Infocom, Inc., 55 Wheeler St., Cambridge, MA 02138, Earth, Sol System © 1983 Infocom, Inc.

Your
Stamp
Here

SOUVENIR POSTCARD

INFOCOM-DEALING LIFE FORM
U.S.A. / EARTH
SOL SYSTEM

Nan
on l
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thre

B
L
A
A
B

smash hit space force PLANETFALL. Ever since this PLANETFALL craze hit the belt, no one's set foot in a single video casino or electro-massage parlor. They're all staying home playing PLANETFALL! I haven't seen anything like this since the day the Accardian spaceship kidnapped me right out of my cockpit!

Best wishes -

Amelia Earhart

FRIENDLY INFOCOM DEALER
U.S.A.
EARTH
SOL SYSTEM

RAM
The "Circu
nostalgic s
Age battl

Planetfall™ Novelties by Infocom, Inc.
55 Wheeler St., Cambridge, MA 02138, Earth, Sol System

© 1983 Infocom, Inc.

GRZTINKS, HUMANOID!
WE MUTANTS AM FRESAT LAST!
MUTANT HUNTIRS ALL 2 BIZZY
PLAYINK PLANETFALL,
NU SCI-FI LAFF CLASSIK
FROM INFOCOM. NOW WE
EXCAPE, COME SEE U, WANT
2 BUY R OWN PLANETFALLS.
PLEEZ STOCK UP 16 BILLYUN
NOW -

US

THE INFOCOM™ CARD

R FRIEND
EARTH
SOL SYSTEM

Planetfall™ Novelties

by

Infocom, Inc.

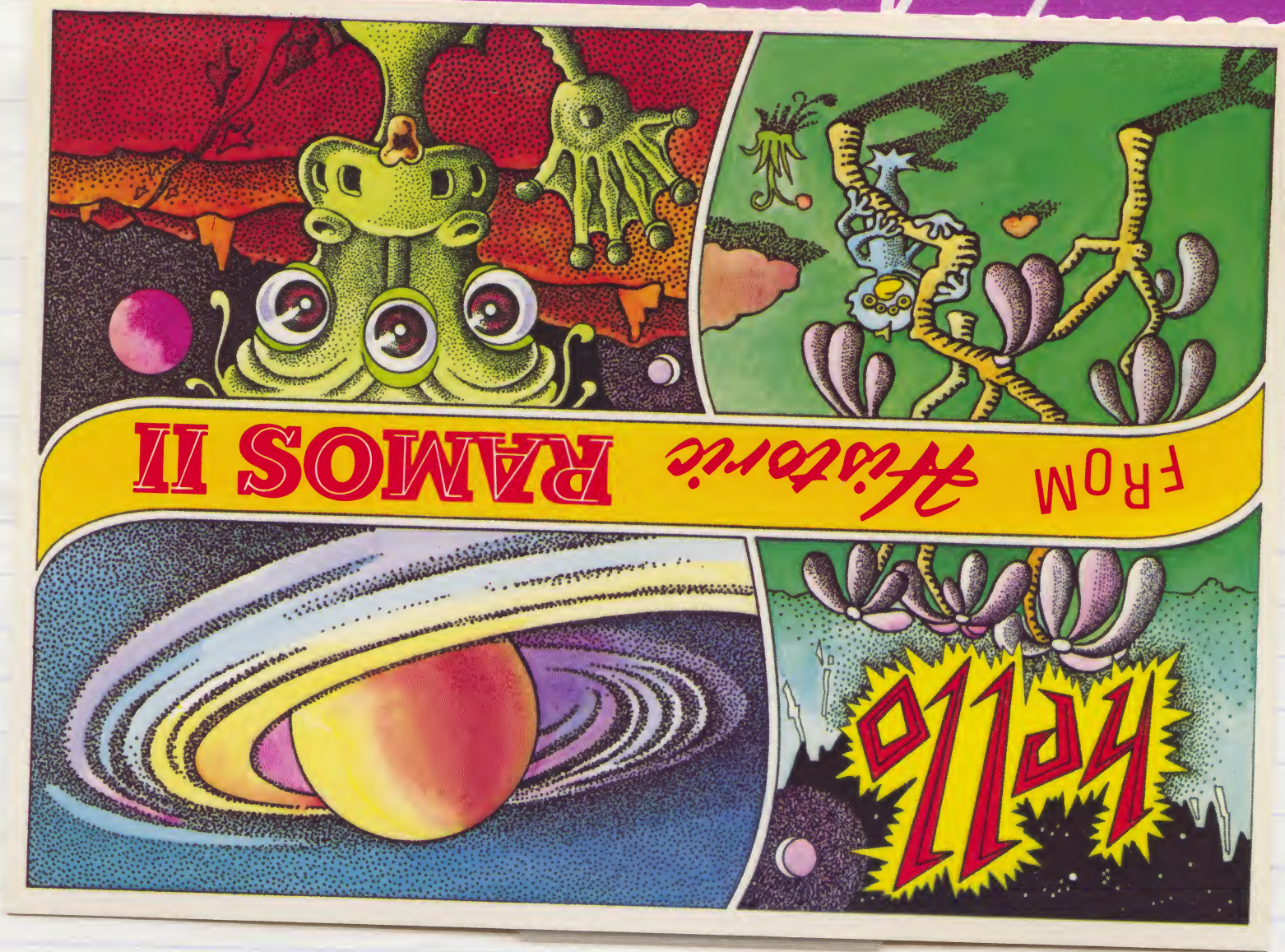
55 Wheeler St., Cambridge, MA

02138

Earth

Sol System

© 1983 Infocom, Inc.



Outside Testing

Beta-testers

Release 1
Sent 5/20/83
Osborne

Release 1
Sent 5/20/83
Apple

Release 1
Sent 5/20/83
Apple

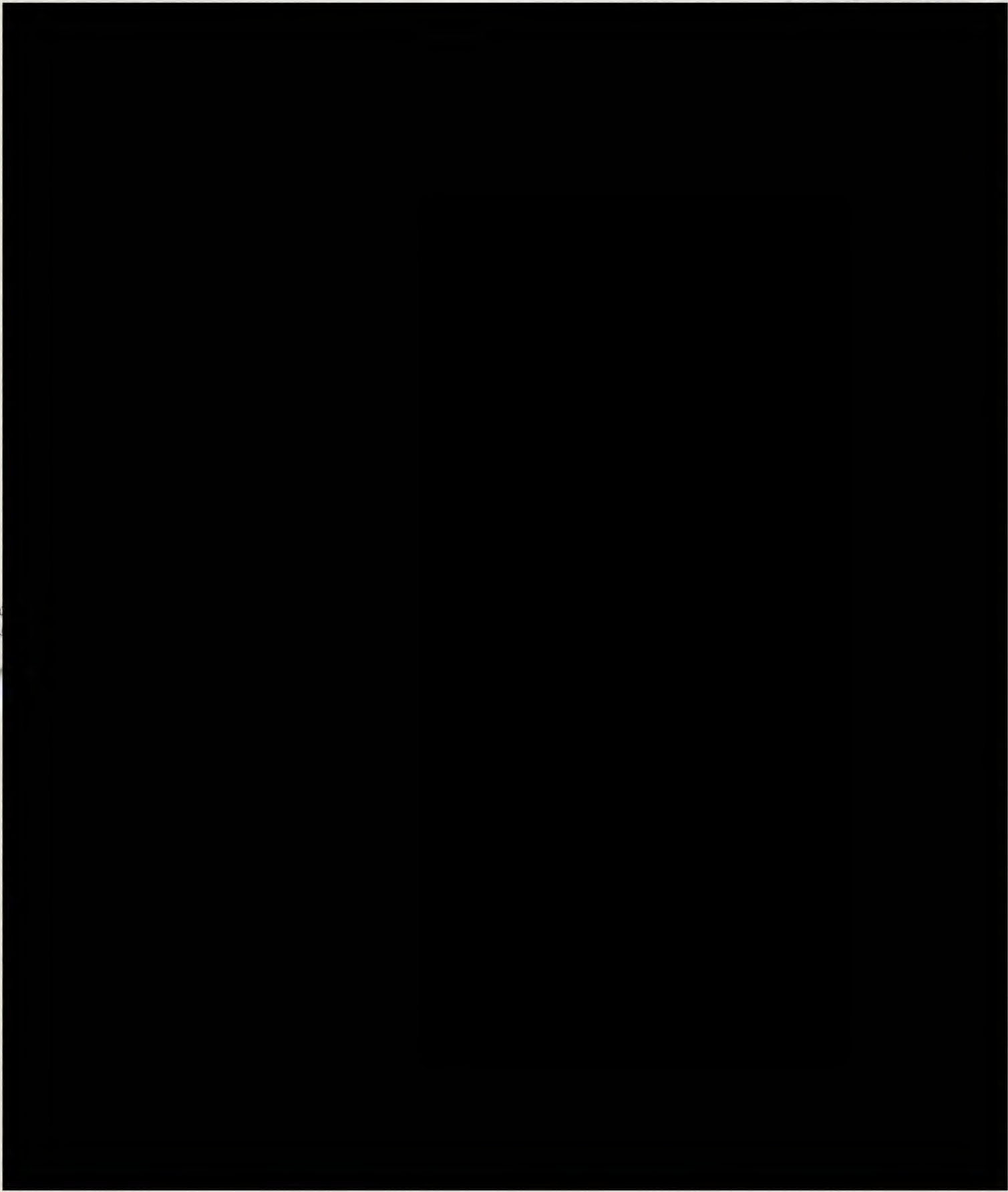
Release 1
Sent 5/20/83
Atari

Release 1
Sent 5/20/83
Apple

[GAMMA]

Release 1
Sent 5/27/83
Apple

Gamma - Testers



Atari 800

Apple 2+

Atari 800

IBM-PC

Apple

Apple III

Osborne

osborne

Infocom, Inc.
55 Wheeler Street
Cambridge, MA 02138

[REDACTED]

Dear [REDACTED]

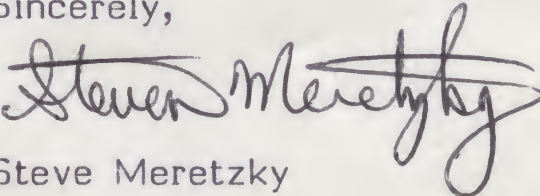
Enclosed is the play-test copy of PLANETFALL that we spoke about. There are also two pieces of documentation enclosed: the manual, and the diary. Both have some important background information about the "universe" where the game occurs.

There's one known bug in this version, but since there's a way around it, and since I'm already behind schedule, and since it may take a while to track down, I'm sending it out anyway. The bug is if you say CHARACTER, DIRECTION (such as BLATHER, NORTH). The response will be "I can't find a verb in that sentence." However, CHARACTER, GO DIRECTION will do the right thing.

I really need feedback by around July 1. Unfortunately that only gives you a little over two weeks. However, I'm scheduled to send the game out on July 8, and I'll need a little time to fix the bugs and incorporate suggestions. Please feel free to call me collect. I'm usually at work until around 7:00 p.m.

I'll send you a copy of the final package as soon as it's ready (probably mid-August). Thanks for testing!

Sincerely,


Steve Meretzky

jump (in elevator)

what is ~~can~~ a gne (in the dark)?

2020-2021 - unmarked

to 11th Street PO
12:10 PM, unmarked

to 11th Street PO
12:10 PM, unmarked

to 11th Street PO
12:10 PM, unmarked

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to 11th Street PO

Infocom, Inc.
55 Wheeler Street
Cambridge, MA 02138

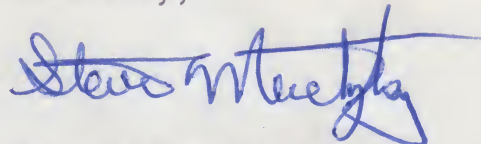
June 17, 1983

Dear 

Enclosed is an updated version of Planetfall. Release 1, which I sent you earlier, has a terrible bug with "EXAMINE" -- you can't examine many objects which are present and should be examinable.

Also, here are some bug reports forms, which you might want to use for reporting bugs (in lieu of scripts or telephoning) if you prefer. I meant to include them in the original package, but I forgot.

Sincerely,



Steve Meretzky

Infocom, Inc.
55 Wheeler Street
Cambridge, MA 02138

June 20, 1983

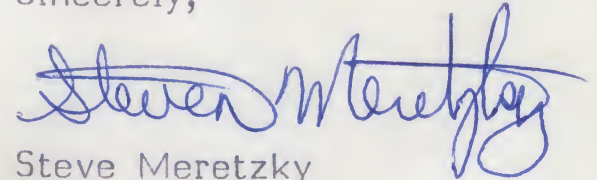
[REDACTED]

Dear [REDACTED]

Third time's a charm.

It turns out that the EXAMINE bug was only partially fixed in Release 5. I was rushing so quickly to get the disks out on Friday afternoon that I didn't test that version thoroughly enough. Anyway, here is a copy of Release 6 with EXAMINE almost definitely working correctly.

Sincerely,



Steve Meretzky

"PLANETFALL is
the best game
that Infocom has
ever made."

- Linda Bushyager

June 5, 1983

Steve Meretzky
Product Designer
Infocom Inc.
55 Wheeler Street
Cambridge, MA 02138

Postage \$1.47

Dear Steve;

Here are the "script" copies of the errors that I found in PLANETFALL. Playing time was aprox. 18 hours, and presented no major problems.

The only real problems I came across were as noted in the printouts, most notably the repeating laser discription. Also (although I did not script it) at one point I attempted to burn the towel with the laser (for use as a torch). When I inventoried later, I found that the towel was not consumed. Also please note that at some points, dropping the towel with the brush causes the towel to be polished. Note also that the use of "examine panel" always gives a description of the laser. Another bug is that when you enter the darkened reactor access stairs or the transportation office, you can see everything, but can touch nothing. I also noticed that the transportation office acts as a maze. Is this intentional?

I enjoyed the game very much, the most appealing portion being the diversity of the game. The passage of time was a factor that I had not encountered before in one of Infocom's games and came as a pleasant surprise. The microscopic portion took me by total suprise. I never did find out what was behind the vault door in the dormitory. Would you please let me know what is there, or give a hint as to how to open it ?

Lastly, I wish that I had had more time to work with the game, as I really only had one good weekend to do so.

Again, let me say that I very much enjoyed the chance to work with you on this, and please feel free to use me in this capacity whenever you or any of the other product designers need a beta test of one of your creations. I will look forward to the arrival of the finished version. Again, please feel free to use my services whenever necessary.

A pleasure, again;

Noel Morgan
Noel Morgan

PS: Does Floyd always have to die?? You're heartless, Steve.

Stephen M. Corrigan

June 27, 1983

Mr. Steven Meretzky
Product Designer
Infocom, Inc.
55 Wheeler Street
Cambridge, MA 02138

Dear Steve:

Thanks for giving me the opportunity to gamma test Planetfall. I am having fun playing it. It is a product I would buy if I saw it advertised.

I found the humor and imagery very entertaining. The game is difficult and I find that somewhat frustrating. I have found one card (Lower Elevator Access) and have not been able to do much with the rest of the items I have found. I like the "Hitchhikers Guide To The Galaxy" flavor of Planetfall. I almost threw my octagonal canteen through the screen when I looked under the Mess Hall table! I thought I would send this preliminary report in as you said that you needed the results by July 1st. I didn't have enough time to do a thorough job of testing. I will continue to play and report bugs as they occur. If there is still time, consider placing the words "Don't Panic" in big red letters on the outside of the package.


One thing I would like to see added to Apple Infocom games is the ability to use 80 column cards and lower case when possible. A great deal more text would be viewable by the player, requiring less LOOK commands. Lower case would make the text more enjoyable to read. An initial menu could ask the player if he has a particular 80 column card available and which slot it resides in. I would vote for support of the Apple //e and the Videx 80 column cards.

Planetfall is a winner. I wish that there was more time to test before sending this report in. If I stumble across any major bugs I will give you a call. Find enclosed two Product Testing Report Forms.

Sincerely,

Stephen M. Corrigan

Stephen M. Corrigan


Steve Meretsky
Infocom, Inc.
55 Wheeler Street
Cambridge, MA 02138

Dear Steve:

Sorry I couldn't find that last empty prompt bug. I just had no way of remembering the special conditions under which it appeared. In playing back through the game I thought that perhaps it existed as a problem only in the first release you sent me, but in checking that out, I had no luck either. Maybe I'll find it later on.


Thanks again for letting me test the game. It was fun. It took a while, but it was fun. My professors can wait on the Thesis. Actually I think they are beginning to doubt whether it even exists at this point. It is, let us say, slightly overdue.

I sent the review I wrote for Planetfall out to Creative Computing this afternoon. One of the editors there told me on the phone this morning that they had no one writing the game up so far, so I just sent them mine. It would nice to publish it, especially since my book has not sold yet.

One thing I said in the review, which I think we talked about once on the phone, was that Planetfall is to my mind the best entry level game Infocom has done. It is the easiest to play; not necessarily to solve, but to enjoy on the first time through. It is the most playable, particularly since the adventurer can avoid the kind of gratuitous death, as you suggested, that is so prevalent in the other games.

Anyhow, I just hope the game does as well on the market as it deserves. Congratulations again on a very nicely written program.

Sincerely,



Reviews, Articles



Infocom, Inc., 55 Wheeler Street, Cambridge, MA 02138
(617) 492-1031

News Release

CONTACT Patricia Maroni
Manager of Public Relations
(617)492-1031

Joan Fasanello
Publicity Assistant

PLANETFALLTM BY INFOCOM
VOTED AMONG MOST ORIGINAL
SOFTWARE OFFERINGS FOR 1983-84

Cambridge, MA (June 4, 1984) --- Infocom, Inc. the leading producer of interactive fiction for personal computers, announced today that Planetfalltm, a popular science fiction adventure story, was voted one of the most original software programs for 1983-84 by a panel of editorial judges assembled for the Consumer Electronics Show (CES) being held in Chicago this week.

The CES Software Showcase experts cited Infocom author Steven Meretzky for "innovativeness of concept, technical superiority, and product uniqueness" in selecting the successful Planetfall adventure from more than 200 consumer software programs represented at CES. The competition is sponsored by the Electronic Industries Association/Consumer Electronics Group.

Included among the panel of judges were Arnie Katz, Editor of Electronic Games, Eric Sanberg-Diment of The New York Times, and John Wallace of Family Computing Magazine.

-more-

Interactive fiction is a new genre of literature that was refined for widespread software distribution by Infocom, Inc. Sophisticated programming techniques combined with witty literary craft allow Infocom users to influence the course of a story by communication with their computers in complex, conversational English.

In Planetfall, award-winning author Meretzky created a futuristic universe with its own language, games and scope of exploration. The story comes on a magnetic disk along with a diary, manual, and a friendly robot named Floyd, who is critical to the solution of the adventure.

Planetfall was previously cited as "Best Adventure Game of '83" by InfoWorld and "Best All-Text Game of the Year" by Computer Games Magazine. Author Steven Meretzky has been individually cited by Video Review Magazine as "The Best Software Designer" of 1984.

Other stories in the Infocom interactive fiction series include the popular Zork® trilogy, Starcrosstm, Suspendedtm, Deadlinetm, The Witnesstm, Enchantertm, Sorcerertm, Infideltm, and Seastalkertm. They retail in price from \$39.95 - \$59.95 and can be purchased in major department stores, personal computer outlets, hobby shops, selected book stores, and through direct mail channels.

Planetfall will be on display at the CES Showcase, located on the mezzanine level of McCormick Place West, June 3-6, during regular show hours. Infocom's exhibit is Booth No. 6826 in McCormick West.

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Video Review

350 EAST 81ST STREET / NEW YORK, NEW YORK 10028 / 212-734-4440

February 24, 1984

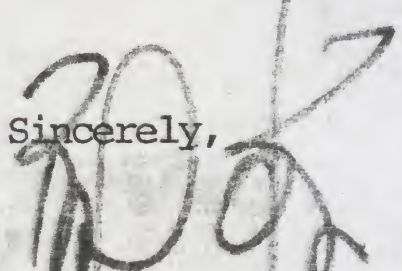
Steve Meretsky
c/o Linda Lawrence
Infocom
55 Wheeler St.
Cambridge, MA

Dear Mr. Meretsky:

I am very happy to announce that you have been nominated for a 1984 Video Review Award (ViRA) in the "Best Designer" category for your game, "Planetfair." We will be holding the awards ceremony and a reception on March 15th at the Savoy Theater; an invitation is enclosed. We would be most honored by your attendance and that of your appropriate colleagues.

On behalf of Richard Ekstract and the editors of Video Review, I would like to extend my congratulations for this nomination.

Sincerely,


Bill O'Brien
Associate Publisher

enclosure

P.S. - Please call me upon receipt of this so
that we can discuss the evening's ceremonies.

VIDEO REVIEW

Invites You to Attend
The Fourth Annual
Video Review Awards

THE ViRAS

Presented for
Outstanding Video Programs of the Year
Thursday, March 15, 1984
Savoy
141 West 44th Street

MASTER OF CEREMONIES:

ROBERT KLEIN

Reception: 6:45 to 8 p.m.
Awards: 8 to 9:15 p.m.
Party: 9:15 to 11:00 p.m.

RSVP by March 8 to Connie Jackson (212) 734-4440
Invited Guests Only

HWH ENTERPRISES, INC.



16 East 52nd Street, New York, NY 10022 212-355-5049

PRESS RELEASE

CLIENT: VIDEO REVIEW

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

CONTACT: Amy L. Alter

March 15, 1984



VIDEO REVIEW ANNOUNCES THE FORMATION
OF THE NATIONAL ACADEMY OF VIDEO ARTS AND SCIENCES

NEW YORK, NY -- The formation of the National Academy of Video Arts and Sciences will be announced Thursday night, March 15, at the 1984 Video Review Awards (ViRAs). The announcement will be made by David Hajdu, editor of Video Review magazine, the nation's leading video publication. The ViRA, honoring outstanding programming in videocassettes, videodiscs and video games, have been sponsored by Video Review for the past four years.

Commenting on the need for the Academy, Hajdu said, "Home video is growing faster than any phenomena in the history of popular entertainment -- so its becoming increasingly difficult for the industry and for consumers to understand and keep track of what is happening. Now the Academy of Video Arts and Sciences will function as an umbrella organization to coordinate and service the needs and demands of the industry and consumers."

The first act for Video Review in launching this organization will be to petition specific suggestions from the industry and press on what the functions, responsibilities and authority of the Academy should entail.

Once the specifics of the group are decided upon, the group will

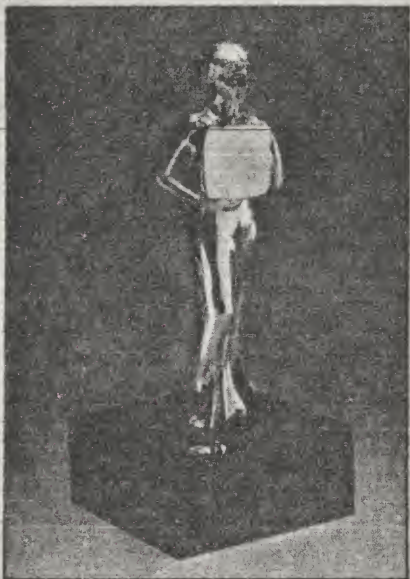
- more -

initiate concrete steps in the establishment of the Academy as a functioning organization. One of the first steps will be to establish the ViRA as an independent, industry-wide effort and representation.

##

initiate concrete steps in the establishment of the Academy as a functioning organization. One of the first steps will be to establish the ViRA as an independent, industry-wide effort and representation.

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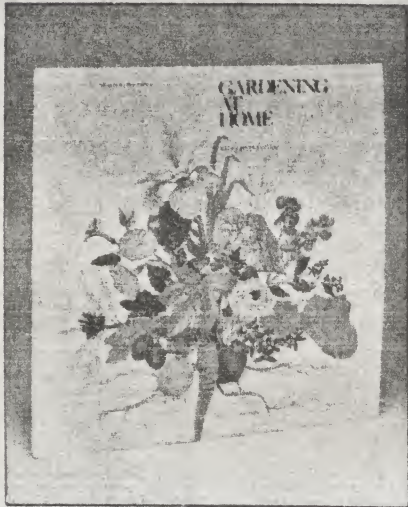
Of the thousands of video programs released over the past year, here they are—the top 21 videotapes, discs and games, as chosen by the editors of *Video Review* on the basis of our reviewers' criticism.

Additionally, we're pleased to present a special Video Review Award (ViRA) this year. The award for Best Technical Achievement goes to the growing number of videocassette and disc companies producing programs with "closed captions" to benefit the hearing impaired. Such attention to an often neglected part of the video audience is a significant and laudable enrichment of the vast American videotape and disc library.

BEST INTERACTIVE PROGRAM

GARDENING AT HOME (Xerox)

"Just what an interactive disc should be, combining the best of the technology to make it both a how-to and a long-lasting reference work. Horticulturist John Lenanton covers everything from watering a lawn to grafting trees. The charts are clear, the index is complete, the glossary is excellent, and the photography is uniformly beautiful."—Genevieve Kazdin (August '83 VR)



BEST MOVIE (NEW OR RECENT RELEASE)



TOOTSIE (RCA/Columbia) "The great comedy about sex roles and feminism in the '80s, it is a modern classic that exposes, through cross-dressing, the cross-purposes of men and women. It's studded with insights into everything from the vulnerability and powerlessness that actors share with women, to a fresh awareness of just what a woman must do to function in the world. The movie has been shot with an intimacy, featuring tight two-shots, that is perfectly adapted to TV screens. *Tootsie* is one of those happy accidents when everything worked."—Molly Haskell (February '84 VR)

BEST MOVIE (CLASSIC)

A HARD DAY'S NIGHT (MPT) "It defined rock stardom—one long escape from the clutches of screaming fans into the hands of calm exploiters. Its black-and-white pictures fit neatly into everyone's 'television' image of the Beatles, and look just fine on TV now—very *verite*—with the too-quick-for-the-theatres timing that can reduce a home viewer to helpless giggles. The movie still offers a lot to ponder, from the Beatles' breezy aplomb and casually exact harmonies to the careful synching of image and music."—Jon Pareles (January '84 VR)



1984 TV

THE VIDEO REVIEW

BEST PROGRAMS OF

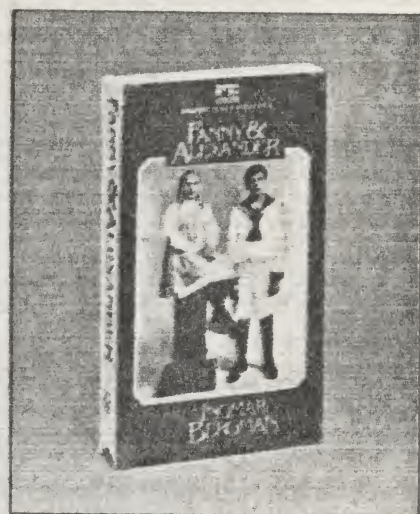


WINNERS VIEW AWARDS FOR FILMS OF THE YEAR

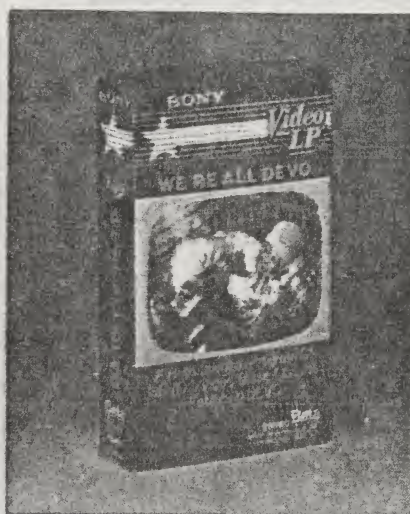


BEST MOVIE (FOREIGN)

FANNY AND ALEXANDER (Embassy) "It has been heralded as Ingmar Bergman's last movie. If so, the renowned Swedish writer-director has ended his career on a high note worthy to be compared with Shakespeare's *The Tempest*. Set in Sweden in the early part of this century, this expansive, extravagant family saga, with the intrusion of ghosts and magic into the otherwise realistic proceedings, is for discerning collectors of movie treasures from abroad."—Andrew Sarris (February '84 VR)



BEST MUSIC PROGRAM (POP OR ROCK)



WE'RE ALL DEVO (Pioneer disc, Sony tape) "This retrospective program of Devo's music video classics reveals the spud boys as the rock-video age's truest auteurs. Fittingly, they were also among the first to do it. Devo's music videos feature a consistency in both conceptual depth and visual style that is unparalleled in the field. In fact, their clips represent the band's character even more cannily than their audio records."—Jim Farber (March '84 VR)

BEST MUSIC SINGLE

HAMMER IN MY HEART/YOU MAKE ME CRAZY/FEET DON'T FAIL ME NOW (Sony/Embassy) "Consistently compelling, it has more visual wit and imagination than a week's worth of MTV. The songs themselves are terrific. The Beta Hi-Fi sound is absolutely superb and will rattle your walls."—Steve Simels (July '83 VR)



BEST OPERA PROGRAM



PAVAROTTI IN LONDON (Pioneer) "Bravo, Luciano! Pavarotti, in concert at London's Royal Albert Hall, runs through nine of the world's favorite arias in a way that reminds you why they're favorites—and why he's a favorite. He's in great voice on this recording, but more than just his voice captivates. The strength of his concentration makes familiar arias fresh again. Sound quality is excellent."—Deirdre Condon (October '83 VR)

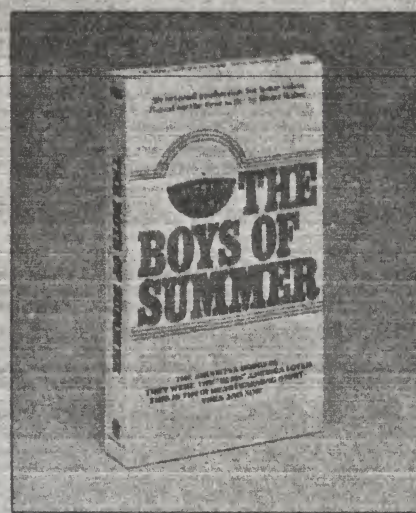
BEST DANCE PROGRAM

FLASHDANCE (Paramount) "It seems to be conceived as a marriage of movies and popular rock 'n' roll video. It boasts an energetic selection of songs, each specifically choreographed, designed and accompanied by playfully surrealistic settings. In some ways it works even better than the theatrical movie, for it provides the opportunity to re-run the many splendid athletic dance numbers. What's most dazzling is its explosive energy—a quality the cassette easily sustains. And why not? From the start the project was conceived with video in mind."—*Marjorie Rosen* (November '83 VR)

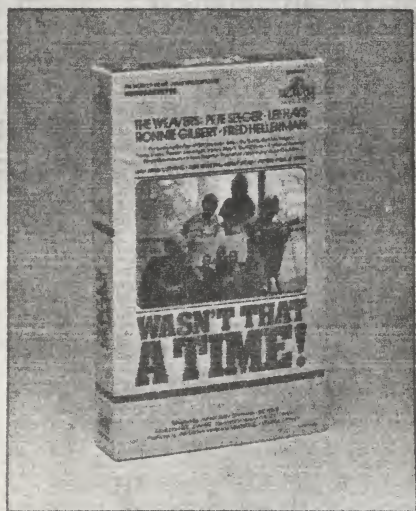


BEST SPORTS PROGRAM

THE BOYS OF SUMMER (Vid-America) "In the autumn of their lives now, they've never really stopped being the boys of summer: Pee Wee Reese, Roy Campanella, Preacher Roe, Skoonj Furillo, Jackie Robinson and the others who, in the late '40s and early '50s, coalesced into something wonderful called the Brooklyn Dodgers. This cassette induces that warmth which marks nostalgic forays into halcyon days, a time when the game was the thing."—*Pete Coutros* (July '83 VR)

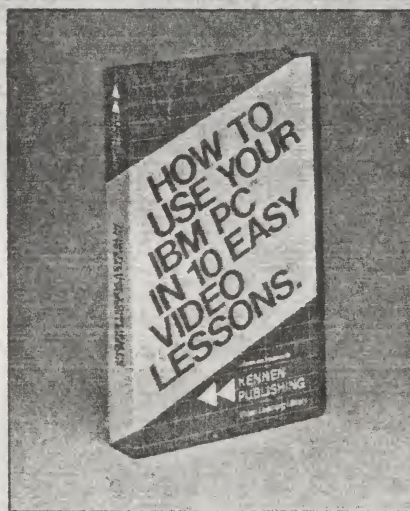


BEST DOCUMENTARY



THE WEAVERS: WASN'T THAT A TIME! (MGM/UA) "A fluent and conversational narrative shifts from place to place and from voice to voice with an ease that is almost unbelievable. Flawless camera work and seamless editing enhance the feeling of effortlessness. It's times like this that I'm glad I usually hoard my superlatives, so I can fling them about when the occasion arises. This tape is a love letter to the human race."—*Dave Van Ronk* (September '83 VR)

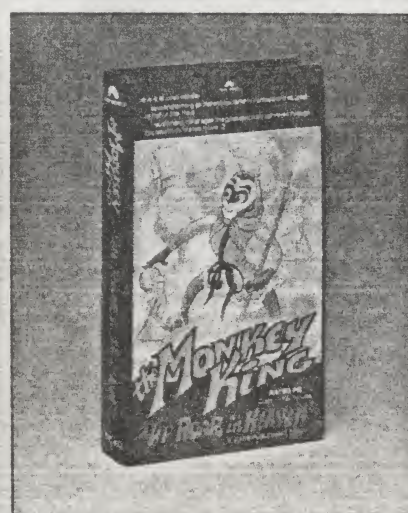
BEST HOW-TO PROGRAM



HOW TO USE YOUR IBM PC IN 10 EASY VIDEO LESSONS (Kennen) "It could be the best medicine for computerphobia, a long tape full of excellent information for the beginner. It's the equivalent of a six-hour course in home computers at the local college, but videotape is the most patient teacher anyone could want."—*Phil Wiswell* (March '84 VR)

BEST ANIMATED PROGRAM

THE MONKEY KING: UPROAR IN HEAVEN (Sun) "The Shanghai Animated Film Studio, combined with the Shanghai Film Symphony Orchestra, adapted this story from the classical Chinese novel, *Pilgrimage to the West*. The perfectly and beautifully drawn animation enables us to see not only a complex adventure but also experience a philosophy different from our own. The magnitude of adventure is as overwhelming as that encountered in *Fantasia*. Here we are moved by the myths of heaven and the vulnerability of the gods."—*Richard Protovin* (October '83 VR)



BEST REFERENCE PROGRAM

SPACE ARCHIVE SERIES (Video Vision) "You can see what it's like to be on a space mission—or on the surface of the moon. And it's completely at your control, unlike television news highlights. Here you've got the whole story, including pre-launch and launch footage, stills of explorations and experiments, and videotapes of life on board during the flights. Now, with these laser-disc programs, we have not only the world at our fingertips, but outer space and the moon as well."—*Dr. Edward Gibson* (February '84 VR)

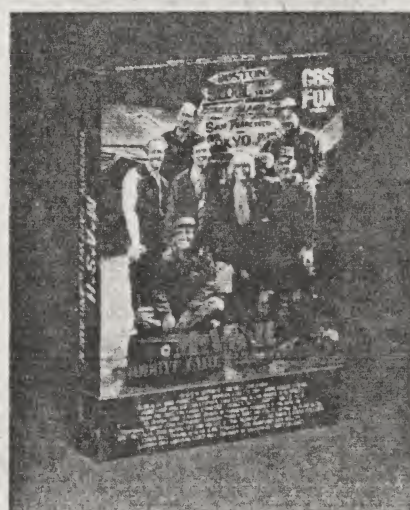


BEST KID VID PROGRAM



THE FROG PRINCE (Muppet Video) "The solution to good movies for little kids, clearly, is to keep them on a little-kid scale; to show them in a well-lit room, not in a darkened theater; to keep them short, simple, funny and lively enough to hold a small child's interest. This goofy 50-minute home video of the traditional fairy tale succeeds on all of these scores. The entire effect is warm, cheery and delightfully child-like."—*Elizabeth Crow* (November '83 VR)

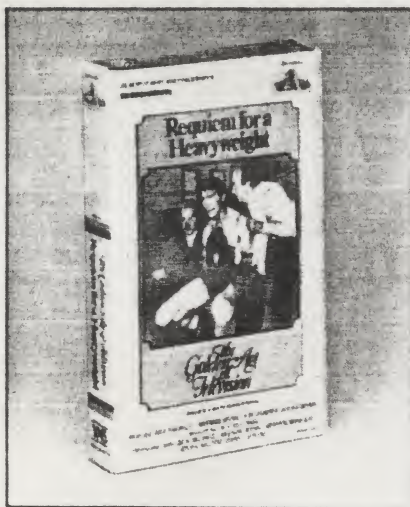
BEST MADE-FOR-TV PROGRAM



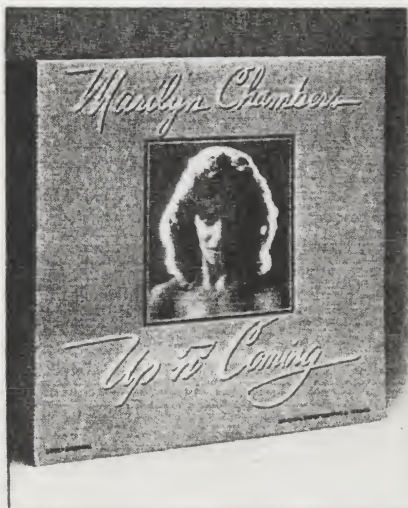
M*A*S*H: GOODBYE, FAREWELL AND AMEN (CBS/Fox) "This final episode became the single most watched show in TV history, a communal event on an epic scale. Long-time fans can revel in the culmination of personalities and relationships that have developed over the show's 11 seasons. For the novice viewer, there's plenty of story, touching performances and scenes that ring true."—*Donna McCrohan* (July '83 VR)

BEST VINTAGE TV PROGRAM

REQUIEM FOR A HEAVY-WEIGHT (MGM/UA) "This is one of the best original '50s dramas that live TV had to offer. It was aired once in the '50s, but not again until '82 on PBS. Jack Palance's delivery, expressions, movements, posture, everything—mind you, without re-takes—represent a performance beyond belief. This tape is for keeping!"—Donna McCrohan (January '84 VR)



BEST ADULT PROGRAM



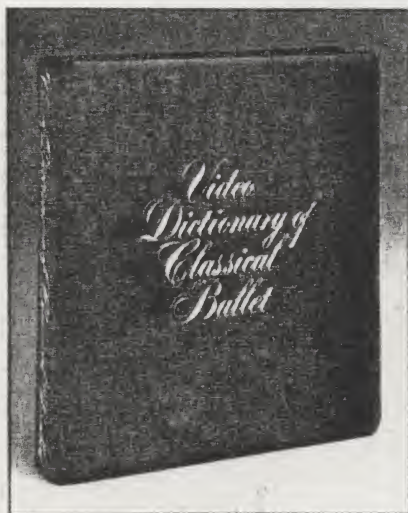
UP 'N' COMING (Creative Image Video) "It may not rank with the discovery of fire, but this is the introduction of the first explicit, hard-core laser disc in the system's relatively short history. With all the makings of a classic of its kind, this has to be one of the best things to happen to the laser-disc system."—Al Goldstein (October '83 VR)

BEST COMPILATION PROGRAM

A NIGHT AT THE MOVIES: 1961 (Warner) Includes a newsreel, a cartoon, coming attractions and the feature movie, *Fanny*. "In the '61 entry in this nostalgic Warner series, the cartoon is delightful, the newsreel features, among other items, Jacqueline Kennedy visiting Greece, the properly teasing coming attractions are for *The Roman Spring of Mrs. Stone* and *Splendor in the Grass*, and the feature is a real honey. *Fanny* superbly captures the warmth, color, and good humor of this most remarkably human of stories."—Roy Hemming (November '83 VR)



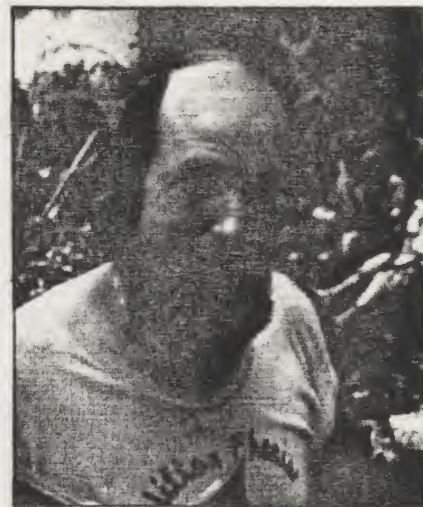
BEST SPECIAL SET



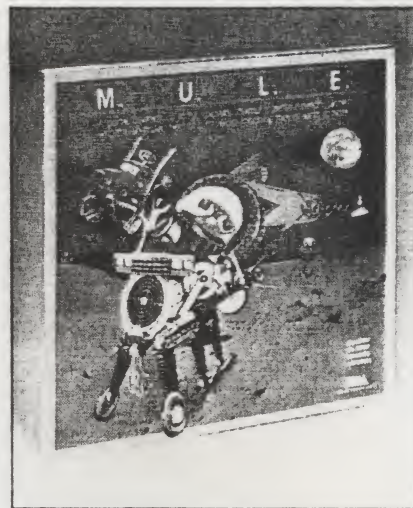
THE VIDEO DICTIONARY OF CLASSICAL BALLET (Trans-Media) "This landmark set of tapes, produced in association with the Metropolitan Opera Guild, is an attempt—and a successful one at that—to compile a visual reference to all the movements of classical ballet."—Wendy Neale (December '83 VR)

BEST DIRECTOR

LES BLANK for **BURDEN OF DREAMS, DEL MERO CORAZON and SPROUT WINGS AND FLY** (Flower Films) "For almost 20 years, Les Blank has scoured modern America for remnants of a simpler, happier, richer life in what has evolved into a personal visual language: skies and rivers and roads and fields and pastures; tools and wildflowers; well-worked hands and well-earned faces. His work is a national treasure."—Robert Christgau and Carole Dibbell (August '83 VR)



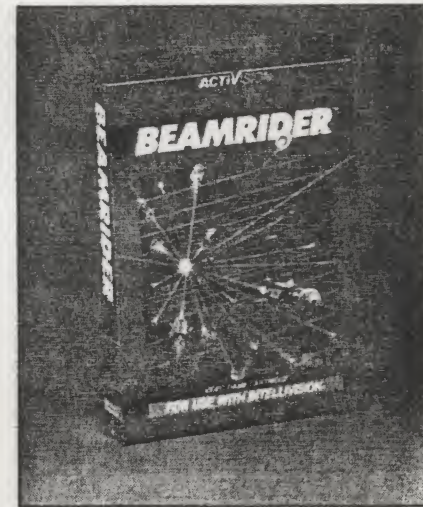
BEST CARTRIDGE GAME



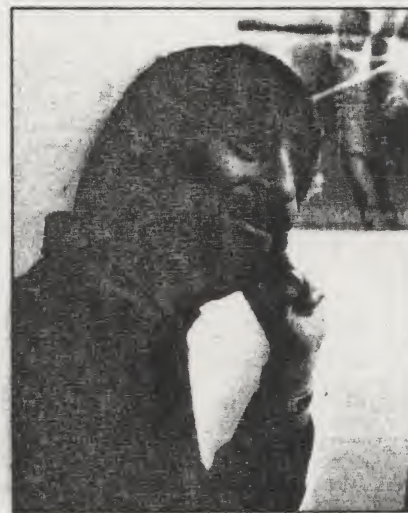
M.U.L.E. (Electronic Arts) "M.U.L.E. comes as a revelation. It not only moves the board game into the electronic age, but also moves the computer game away from its current role as a scaled-down version of video arcade fare. Unlike such disposable entertainments, which come into fashion suddenly and disappear, *M.U.L.E.* seems destined to become a classic."—Sheldon Leemon (December '83 VR)

BEST COMPUTER GAME

BEAMRIDER (Activision) "BeamRider is a space shoot-out—but not your ordinary space shoot-out. . . . The torpedoes give such an authentic 3D feeling that they're a joy to launch just to watch them progress into space. The Gargon explosion is noisy, colorful and fun just to observe. It takes a while to get hooked on *BeamRider*, but the addiction will eventually set in among space shooters. *BeamRider* has found a niche."—Ken Uston (December '83 VR)



BEST COMPUTER SOFTWARE DESIGNER



STEVEN MERETSKY for **PLANETFALL** (Infocom) "Space has been called a lot of things—deep, limitless, the final frontier and, up till now, anything but funny. Enter *Planetfall*, Steven Meretsky's text game extraordinaire. Although Infocom makes an attempt to integrate as much humor as possible into each and every one of its games, *Planetfall* stands as its first full-fledged piece of comedy—a feat for which Meretsky can't get enough praise. The invention of the robot sidekick, Floyd, was a stroke of genius. *Planetfall* is fun and funny stuff."—Michael Blanchet (December '83 VR)

STRATEGY

PLUS

All-Time Greats

STRATEGY

Civilization (Microprose)
Railroad Tycoon (Microprose)
Warlords (SSG)
The Perfect General (QQP)
Command HQ (Microprose)
Populous (Electronic Arts)
Empire (Interstel)
Reach for the Stars (SSG)
Battles of Destiny (QQP)
Nobunagas Ambition (Koei)

WAR GAMES

V For Victory series (Three Sixty)
Harpoon (Three Sixty)
Carriers at War (SSG)
Kampfgruppe (SSI)
Universal Military Simulator II (Microprose)
Red Lightning (SSI)
Patton Strikes Back (Broderbund)
Western Front (SSI)
Fire Brigade (Panther)
East Front - Atari 800 (Atari)

ADVENTURES

Zork (Infocom)
Monkey Island 2 (Lucasarts)
Laura Bow II (Sierra On-Line)
Planetfall (Infocom)
Indian Jones & the Fate of Atlantis (Lucasarts)
Neuromancer (Interplay)
King's Quest VI (Sierra On-Line)
Rise of the Dragon (Dynamix)
Heart of China (Dynamix)
The Lost Files of Sherlock Holmes (Electronic Arts)

ROLE PLAYING

Ultima Underworld (Origin)
Crusaders of the Dark Savant (Sir Tech)
DungeonMaster (FTL)
Bard's Tale (Sierra On-Line)
Eye of the Beholder (SSI)
Eye of the Beholder II (SSI)
Wolfenstein (Apogee)
Might and Magic III (New World)
The Summoning (SSI)
Pool of Radiance (SSI)

SPORTS

Links 386 Pro (Access)
Front Page Sports Football (Dynamix)
Earl Weaver Baseball (Electronic Arts)
World Circuit (Microprose)
NFL Pro League (Micro Sports)
Pro Tennis Tour 2 - Amiga (Ubi Soft)
NFL Challenge (XOR)
Wayne Gretzky Hockey III (Bethesda)
Hardball III (Accolade)
TV Sports Football - Amiga (Cinemaware)

FLIGHT SIMULATIONS

Falcon 3.0 (Spectrum HoloByte)
Red Baron (Dynamix)
Chuck Yeager's Air Combat (Electronic Arts)
Comanche: Maximum Overkill (NovaLogic)
Gunship 2000 (Microprose)
F15 Strike Eagle III (Microprose)
B-17 (Microprose)
Jetfighter 2 (Velocity)
Aces of the Pacific (Dynamix)
Secret Weapons of the Luftwaffe (Lucasarts)

MISCELLANEOUS

Wing Commander (Origin)
Wing Commander II (Origin)
M1 Tank Platoon (Microprose)
Task Force 1942 (Microprose)
Silent Service II (Microprose)
Great Naval Battles of the North Atlantic (SSI)
Red Storm Rising (Microprose)
Tank (Spectrum HolyByte)
Speedball II (Konami)
M.U.D.S. (Rainbow Arts)

If you disagree with these choices, then here's who to blame: Joseph Boone, Sandy Eisen, Steve Wartofsky, Greg Ellsworth, Joan McKeown, Richard Lawrence, John Harrington, Peter Szymonik, Marc Dultz, David Bolton, John Van Valer, Lee Johnson, Andrew Backer, Theo Clarke, Ian Marsh, Joseph McCullough, Brian Walker, Mike Woodhouse, and Moggy the games playing cat



888 SEVENTH AVENUE, NEW YORK, N.Y. 10106 (212) 541-7100

M A G A Z I N E

Dear Infocom,

Congratulations! You are the winner of a Golden Floppy Award.

Each year Computer Games Magazine awards the "Floppies" to titles released in the last year that combine excellent graphics, superior play action and high interest level to give us games that rise above all others in their categories.

The Golden Floppies will be announced in our August issue, which goes on sale June 17th and will be on display at the Consumer Electronics Show. A certificate will follow this letter. We are preparing artwork for small stickers that you may put on your packaging, if you would like.

Once again, congratulations. And thanks for giving us a great game.

Planetfall

Your Golden Floppy: ~~Enchanter~~, All-Text Game of the Year

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "Dan Gutman".

Dan Gutman
Editor

COMPUTER GAMES MAGAZINE

GOLDEN

1984



FLOPPY

AWARD FOR EXCELLENCE

Movies have their Oscars and music has its Grammy Awards. Computer games are as much an art form as any other field of entertainment, and certainly deserve awards of their own. We are not ones to blindly proclaim that all computer, arcade and home video games are excellent.

Some are awful! It is the rare game that combines graphics, playability and fun to capture the hearts of the players. The following games meet these criteria, and we are happy to award them Computer Games Magazine's "Golden Floppy" Award for excellence. Congratulations!

GOLDEN

1984



FLOPPY

AWARD FOR EXCELLENCE

COMPUTER
GAMES

GAME OF THE YEAR

BLUE MAX

(Synapse)

HONORABLE MENTION:
PLANETFALL, JUMPMAN,
POLE POSITION, DIMENSION X

SHOOT-'EM-UP OF THE YEAR

BLUE MAX

(Synapse)

HONORABLE MENTION: ZAXXON,
ASTRO CHASE, STAR TREK

BEST GRAPHICS OF THE YEAR

POLE POSITION

(Atari)

HONORABLE MENTION: BEACH-HEAD,
QUEST FOR TIRES, DIMENSION X

BEST MUSIC OF THE YEAR

RESCUE SQUAD

(Muse)

HONORABLE MENTION: MULE,
MONSTER SMASH,
DRAGONRIDERS OF PERN, ARCHON,
SPY'S DEMISE, NECROMANCER,
DIMENSION XBEST ALL-TEXT ADVENTURE
OF THE YEAR**PLANETFALL**

(Infocom)

HONORABLE MENTION: ENCHANTER,
SUSPENDEDBEST GRAPHIC ADVENTURE OF
THE YEAR**THE QUEST**

(Penguin)

HONORABLE MENTION: MASK OF
THE SUN, THE DARK CRYSTAL,
GRUDS IN SPACE

STRATEGY GAME OF THE YEAR

SARGON III

(Hayden)

HONORABLE MENTION: ARCHON,
KNIGHTS OF THE DESERT

SPORTS GAME OF THE YEAR

STAR LEAGUE BASEBALL

(Gamestar)

HONORABLE MENTION: ONE ON ONE,
PITSTOP, POLE POSITION, MAJOR
LEAGUE HOCKEY, ATARI FOOTBALL

MAZE GAME OF THE YEAR

OIL'S WELL

(Sierra On-Line)

HONORABLE MENTION: MS. PAC-
MAN, DIAMOND MINE, RESCUE
SQUAD, JUICE

CLIMBING GAME OF THE YEAR

JUMPMAN

(Epyx)

HONORABLE MENTION: HARD HAT
MACK, ZOMBIES, LODGE RUNNER,
THE HEISTARCADE TRANSLATION OF THE
YEAR**FROGGER**

(Parker)

HONORABLE MENTION: POLE
POSITION, ZAXXONFANTASY/ROLE-PLAYING GAME
OF THE YEAR**ULTIMA III**

(Origin)

HONORABLE MENTION: TELEGARD,
GATEWAY TO APSHAI, LEGACY OF
LLYLGAMYN

BEST ANIMATION OF THE YEAR

POGO JOE

(Screenplay)

HONORABLE MENTION: QUEST FOR
TIRES, POPEYE, DROL, BRISTLES,
BEACH-HEADMOST INNOVATIVE GAME
OF THE YEAR**PINBALL****CONSTRUCTION SET**

(Electronic Arts)

HONORABLE MENTION: THE ARCADE
MACHINE, LIFESPAN, DRELBS, CRUSH
CRUMBLE AND CHOMP, FLIP 'N'
FLOP, PRISONER 2BEST EDUCATIONAL GAME
OF THE YEAR**TYPE ATTACK**

(Sirius)

HONORABLE MENTION: WORDRACE,
INTELLECTUAL DECATHLON

FUNNIEST GAME OF THE YEAR

SPARE CHANGE

(Broderbund)

HONORABLE MENTION: QUEST FOR
TIRES, DROL, Q*BERT

WEIRDEST GAME OF THE YEAR

MOONDUST

(Creative)

HONORABLE MENTION: WORMS,
DROL

SICKEST GAME OF THE YEAR

THE BILESTOAD

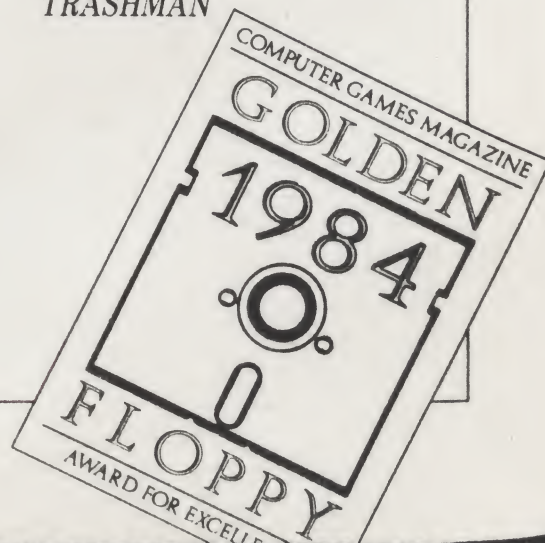
(Datamost)

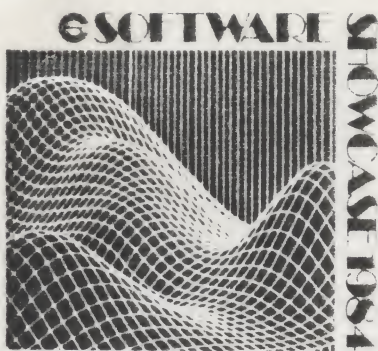
HONORABLE MENTION: EPIDEMIC,
SAVE NEW YORK

STUPIDEST GAME OF THE YEAR

TRIAD

(Adventure International)

DISHONORABLE MENTION: POOYAN,
TRASHMAN



Electronic Industries Association/Consumer Electronics Group
2001 Eye Street, N.W., Washington, DC 20006 (202) 457-4919

TO: CONSUMER ELECTRONICS SHOWS SOFTWARE SHOWCASE APPLICANTS

FROM: Jack Wayman, Senior Vice President
Consumer Electronics Shows

SUBJECT: PROGRAMS SELECTED FOR THE CES SOFTWARE SHOWCASE 1984

Infocom, Inc. - Planetfall

Congratulations! We are pleased to advise you that the program(s) listed above was/were selected as among the most original video, computer and/or game program(s) for 1983-1984.

It/they will be on display at the Showcase located on the mezzanine level of McCormick West during the 1984 Summer Consumer Electronics Show, June 3 - 6, 1984 during Show hours.

Because a number of programs will be shown on each computer, game machine, VCR, and video disc player, your award winner will be shown on a rotating basis with the other winners.

The 50 or less word description which you submitted with your application will appear on a large panel at the Showcase.

Show exhibitors will receive a special award ribbon for use in their booth during the Show. An additional personalized plaque will be sent to your company approximately 5 to 6 weeks after the show.

PLEASE READ THE FOLLOWING PROCEDURES AND INSTRUCTIONS CAREFULLY TO MAKE SURE YOUR WINNING PROGRAM IS PROPERLY DISPLAYED.

1. ATTENTION VIDEO AND AND RECREATIONAL SOFTWARE WINNERS: Please stop by the Software Showcase between the hours of 12:00 Noon and 9:00PM, Saturday, June 2nd, to be sure your product is working properly.

2. ATTENTION ALL OTHER WINNERS: (Education, Personal Productivity, Home Management, Word Processing, and Other): Because your product undoubtedly requires demonstration to be effectively presented at the Showcase, we ask that you please send a representative from your company to the Showcase, Saturday, June 2nd between the hours of 4:00 PM and 8:00 PM to teach our demonstrators how to operate your program. If no one from your company is available during the above hours please call Karen Hooper at 312/791-6610 to arrange for another time.

A Special Exhibit of the Summer Consumer Electronics Shows.

3. ATTENTION: If you did not supply us with separate packaging with your entry form, please bring it to the Showcase at either of the above times.

Please remember to ask for your special award ribbon when you stop by to check on your program. Thank you very much for participating in this second annual Software Showcase, which we are confident will assist all consumer electronics manufacturers in the marketing of home computer and video products.

Congratulations again! See you in Chicago.

THE BEST AND THE REST

THE MOST POPULAR PROGRAM OF 1983

The votes are in. The will of the people is served. The most and least popular programs of 1983 are now known.

The voting point system worked thus: Ten points were awarded to a program for each first place vote, nine points for second place, and so on, down to one point for each tenth place vote.

The non-Apple/Atari voting contingent is still too scattered to count; about one-tenth of one percent. Next year, though, it looks like Commodore, at least, will be represented strongly enough to make both Best and Worst into three-way events (which means *Zaxxon* could get on six times).

Most Popular Program: Apple

Place	Points	Program, programmer, company
1.	1,786	<i>Lode Runner</i> , Doug Smith, Broderbund
2.	1,254	<i>Legacy of Llylgamyn</i> , Andrew Greenberg and Robert Woodhead, Sir-tech
3.	1,096	<i>Ultima III</i> , Lord British, Origin Systems
4.	723	<i>Miner 2049er</i> , Mike Livesay, Micro Lab
5.	717	<i>Zaxxon</i> , John Garcia, Datasoft
6.	669	<i>Hard Hat Mack</i> , Michael Abbot and Matthew Alexander, Electronic Arts
7.	478	<i>Drol</i> , Benny Ngo, Broderbund
8.	448	<i>One-on-One</i> , Eric Hammond, Electronic Arts
9.	428	<i>Pinball Const. Set</i> , Bill Budge, Electronic Arts
10.	339	<i>Planetfall</i> , Steve Meretzky, Infocom

Most popular program of all time: *Wizardry*, Andrew Greenberg and Robert Woodhead, Sir-tech

Most Popular Program: Atari

Place	Points	Program, programmer, company
1.	506	<i>Archon</i> , Free Fall, Electronic Arts
2.	497	<i>Blue Max</i> , Bob Polin, Synapse
3.	385	<i>M.U.L.E.</i> , Ozark Softscape, Electronic Arts
4.	347	<i>Pole Position</i> , Atari
5.	266	<i>Lode Runner</i> , Doug Smith, Broderbund
6.	261	<i>Miner 2049er</i> , Bill Hogue, Big Five
7.	252	<i>Jumpman</i> , Randy Glover, Epyx
8.	227	<i>Ultima III</i> , Lord British, Origin Systems
9.	174	<i>Pinball Const. Set</i> , Bill Budge, Electronic Arts
10.	165	<i>Shamus</i> , William Mataga, Synapse

Most popular program of all time: *Star Raiders*, Atari



DOG OF THE YEAR

It's still the same old story. . . Just as *Frogger* walked away with the contest in 1982, once again another arcade hit was translated for the home computer, upsetting folks because it didn't look like the original. Maybe if they'd called it *Zaxxon Jr.* . . .

Here, the game in the #1 spot received the most votes, meaning #10 was only one-tenth as unpleasant. Names of companies and programmers are tactfully unmentioned.

Obviously, few were able to restrict themselves to 1983 releases. We must bow to the will of the majority—except in those instances where some troublemakers insisted on including the wonderful new name of this magazine on their ballots.

The technically lucky winners of the random drawing from all ballots received are C.V. Fields, who will get *The Missing Ring* for his Apple, and Steve Koppke, who will get *Alien Garden* for his Atari—used, of course.

Apple

Place	Points	Program
1.	183	<i>Zaxxon</i>
2.	144	<i>Cubit</i>
3.	143	<i>Jump Jet</i>
4.	108	<i>Frogger</i>
5.	90	<i>Canyon Climber</i>
6.	83	<i>Tubeway</i>
7.	81	<i>Plasmania</i>
8.	77	<i>The Missing Ring</i>
9.	74	<i>Bouncing Kamungas</i>
10.	73	<i>Dig Dug</i>

Atari

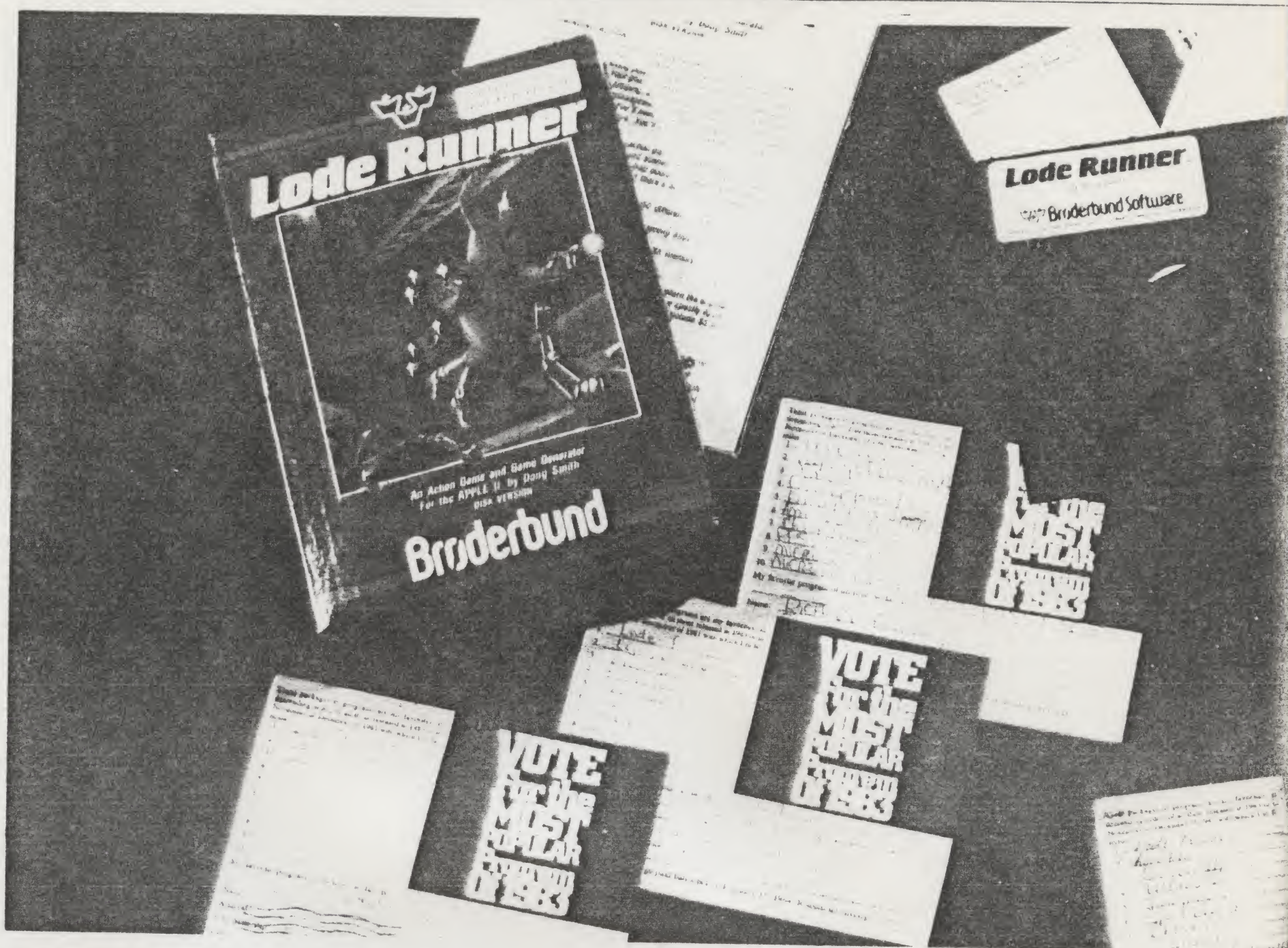
Place	Points	Program
1.	136	<i>Congo Bongo</i>
2.	124	<i>E.T.</i>
3.	117	<i>Zaxxon</i>
4.	88	<i>Dig Dug</i>
5.	66	<i>Q*Bert</i>
6.	55	<i>Star Trek</i>
7.	49	<i>Floyd of the Jungle</i>
8.	48	<i>Spy's Demise</i>
	48	<i>Gwendolyn</i>
10.	39	<i>Wall War</i>

Dubious Honorable Mention:

IBM: *Paratrooper*

C-64: *Robber of the Lost Tomb*

LODE RUNNER RUNS AWAY



WIZARDRY REPEATS WITH ITS SECOND

In horse racing, it's called form.

Among ethnic groups, it's called tradition.

In the Apple market, you might call it business as usual.

Whatever label you place on it, software from Broderbund and Sir-tech were the most honored by Apple buyers for the year of 1983, repeating the 1982 results.

Lode Runner from Broderbund was the favorite program of 1983, following in the footsteps of 1982's winner, *Choplifter*. *Wizardry* from Sir-tech repeated as the all-time favorite program. For the Apple III, the *Catalyst* from Quark was the most popular program.

In the voting for all-time champ, there were parallels with the prior year. Like last year, it wasn't even close. *Wizardry* had a 3-to-1 advantage over second-place *Apple Writer II*. More amazing was that *Wizardry* duplicated its 4-to-1 lead over the most popular program of the year.

In last year's voting for the 1982 most popular program, *Choplifter* edged out *Wizardry* for the year's honor. But *Wizardry* scored an overwhelming victory in the all-time race while *Choplifter* came in fourth. That scenario was essentially repeated in that *Lode Runner* scored fourth on the all-time list and trailed *Wizardry* by the same 4-to-1 ratio that reflected the difference between *Choplifter* and *Wizardry* the year before.

Unlike *Choplifter*, with its narrow victory over *Wizardry* as the most popular program of 1982, *Lode Runner* won in a walk. It was named on 167 more ballots than runner-up *Pinball Construction Set* and tallied more than fifteen hundred more points. The race was close for second,

however, as *Pinball Construction Set* narrowly edged *Ultima III*. *PCS* was named on 85 more ballots but racked up only a thirty-three-point decision.

For readers new to the magazine, *Softalk*'s one hundred seventy thousand subscribers were asked to vote for their ten favorite programs released in the time frame from October 1982 to December 1983. In addition, they could vote for one program released at any time as their all-time favorite.

Votes were tabulated by allotting ten points for a first-place vote, nine points for a second, and so forth down to one point for a tenth-place vote. Results for the most popular award for 1983 are measured by the most points, rather than by the most votes. Results for the all-time favorite are on the basis of most votes.

The omission of several of the bestselling pieces of Apple software—such as *VisiCalc*, *PFS:File*, *DOS Boss*, *Zork I*, *MasterType*, *Home Accountant*, or *Choplifter*—does not indicate a lack of popularity or lack of quality. As older releases, they simply weren't eligible for consideration in 1983.

Likewise, the relatively weak showing of such new programs as *One-on-One* and *Flight Simulator II* reflect their newness to the market. Rather than drawing negative conclusions, it's appropriate to marvel that they scored so well while being sold for such a minor portion of the eligibility period.

Charge of the Eight Hundred. For all the hoopla about the IBM

yet published a program in 1982, and Beagle Bros also placed four programs each on the 1983 list. **Infocom** had three packages on the list and Apple Computer, Sierra On-Line, and Microsoft each had two entries.

Microsoft tied Broderbund for the lead on the all-time list with three entries. Placing two programs on the All-Time Top Thirty were Electronic Arts, Sir-tech, Apple, Sierra On-Line, Beagle Bros, and Penguin.

Poll Vault. The most popular poll allows Apple owners to talk back to the *Softalk* Bestseller poll. The *Softalk* poll measures sales. The most popular poll measures user satisfaction. As usual, the owners liked some products that haven't registered so high on the sales charts.

Stellar 7, an arcade game that met with so-so success at the cash register, measured high in satisfaction, landing in thirteenth place. Two other arcade games, *Drol* and *Sammy Lightfoot*, scored higher than sales might indicate, although *Drol* is still new enough that it may make a bigger impression in subsequent Bestseller polls.

The biggest surprise was *Fontrix*, the revolutionary graphics system from Data Transforms. *Fontrix* has never been able to break through the dominance of Beagle Bros to place on the Hobby 10. Yet it outran dozens of better sellers to grab twenty-ninth on the most popular poll.

There were some surprises in the all-time list in that many programs that hadn't rated that high last year managed to make the list this year.

Magic Window, virtually ignored in last year's all-time contest, tied for twentieth in this year's balloting. *Adventure*, running neck and neck with *Global Program Line Editor* as the oldest program on the list, came from last year's also-ran position to tie for twenty-second. Among the programs that tied for twenty-sixth were *Flight Simulator*, *PIE Writer*, and *ASCII Express*, all programs that apparently benefited from upgrades between elections.

The top nine programs from last year's all-time list remained on the list again this year, but only four other of last year's favorites maintained positions on the list. New isn't necessarily better, however. Only *Lode Runner* and *Ultima III* of 1983's entries were able to crack the top ten.

The continuing popularity of *Castle Wolfenstein* is worth noting. Two years ago, when only a most popular poll for 1981 was conducted, *Castle Wolfenstein* placed second to *Raster Blaster*. Last year, it placed third all-time to *Wizardry* and *VisiCalc*. This year it scored sixth on the all-time list. With the exceptions of *Wizardry* and *VisiCalc*, this is the strongest showing of any program over the three-year period.

Buckaroo Buzz. Other than remarking on specific programs, voters most often commented on the intertwined issues of piracy and software prices. Some voters who failed to list ten programs pointed out that they didn't have enough money to buy ten programs in a year at today's

prices. Others confessed to piracy while protesting that they'd quit if the software prices came down. Another regular refrain was to praise Beagle Bros and Penguin for their restraint in pricing and their policies of not copy-protecting their programs.

Another facet of the issue was presented by the voter who listed only business and utility programs on his ballot. His comment was that *Locksmith* was "my favorite game."

Two software genres inspired partisanship that cut both ways. While most comments on software would merely cite attributes of their favorites, voters had strong likes and dislikes when it came to arcade games and word processors. Arcade game players felt compelled to put down the programs they thought might be in competition with their favorite, as in, "I love *Zaxxon*, but I can't stand *Lode Runner*."

Word processing program adherents were even more vindictive. They'd let their vote represent the positive comment while taking advantage of the comment line to blast others.

The word processing category came up with an invisible program this year in *Sensible Speller*. Last year, it was rated best word processing program of 1982. It wasn't eligible this year, but it got more comments than any other program. The problem was that it was always in the second position, such as, "*Format II* and *Sensible Speller* have made my writing better."

Because the word processor linked with it was getting the all-time vote, *Sensible Speller* does not show up on the all-time list. But a straw vote of the comments would show *Sensible Speller* to be the most consistently highly thought of program in the word processing genre.

Eight Is Enough. One of the statistics *Softalk* calculates from the votes but doesn't print is the average value of each vote a program receives. A perfect average is 10.00, meaning that all of those who voted for a package made it their favorite. An excellent average is 8.00, meaning that on average a program is among the three best that the Apple owner has.

Programs receiving votes averaging 8.00 or higher were few and far between. Only *Apple Writer II* achieved that level among the 1983 Top Thirty. *Ultima III* was second at 7.75.

APPLE III TEN

- 1 **Catalyst**, Tim Gill, Quark
- 2 **Quick File III**, Rupert Lissner, Apple Computer
- 3 **Keystroke Database**, Brock Software Products
- 4 **Apple Speller III**, Charles Hartley/Sensible, Apple Computer
- 5 **Multiplan**, Microsoft
- 6 **Think Tank III**, David Winer and John Llewellyn, Living Videotext
- 7 **BPI General Ledger III**, John Moss and Ken Debower, Apple Computer
- 8 **Inkwell III**, Foxware
- 9 **Terminus**, Tim Gill, Quark
- Payroll, State of the Art

MORE ARCADE TEN

- 12 **Minit Man**, Greg Malone, Penguin
- 13 **Spare Change**, Dan and Mike Zeller, Broderbund
- 14 **Bolo**, Elvyn Software, Synergistic
- Repton**, Dan Thompson, Sirius
- 16 **Cubit**, Abe Oswal, Micromax
- 17 **Super Taxman II**, Brian Fitzgerald, H.A.L. Labs
- 18 **Wavy Navy**, Rodney McAuley, Sirius
- 19 **Microbe**, Bob Clardy and Alan Zalta, Synergistic
- 20 **Bilestoad**, Mangrove Earthshoe, Datamost
- 21 **Evolution**, Don Mattick and Jeff Sember, Sydney Development

HOME EDUCATION TEN

- 1 **Rocky's Boots**, Warren Robinett and Leslie Grimm, The Learning Company
- 2 **Computer SAT**, Harcourt Brace Jovanovich
- 3 **Stickybear ABC**, Richard Hefter and Jack Rice, Weekly Reader Family Software
- 4 **Type Attack**, Jim Hauser and Ernie Brock, Sirius
- 5 **In Search of the Most Amazing Thing**, Tom Snyder, Spinnaker
- 6 **Early Games for Young Children**, John Paulson, Counterpoint
- 7 **Stickybear Numbers**, Richard Hefter and Janie and Steve Worthington, Weekly Reader Family Software
- 8 **Delta Drawing**, Computer Access Corporation, Spinnaker
- 9 **Fat City**, Richard Hefter and Steve Worthington, Weekly Reader Family Software
- 10 **Microzine**, Information Technology Design Associates, Scholastic

WORD PROCESSORS TEN

- 1 **Apple Writer II**, Paul Lutus, Apple Computer
- 2 **Bank Street Writer**, Gene Kuzmiak and Bank Street College of Education, Broderbund
- 3 **PFS:Write**, Sam Edwards, Brad Crain, and Ed Mitchell, Software Publishing
- 4 **HomeWord**, Ken Williams and Jeff Stephenson, Sierra On-Line
- 5 **Word Juggler II**, Tim Gill, Quark
- 6 **Apple Writer II Preboot Disk**, Kevin Armstrong and Mark Borgerson, Videx
- 7 **Megawriter**, Megahaus
- 8 **Lexicheck II**, Tim Gill, Quark
- 9 **Write Away**, Doug Stinson, Midwest Software Associates
- 10 **Cut & Paste**, Tim Mott, Norma Lane, Steve Shaw, David Maynard, Dan Silva, Steve Hayes, and Jerry Morrison, Electronic Arts

on the Word Processing 10 list. The two newest entrants in the word processing sweepstakes—*PFS:Write* and *HomeWord*—were next. *Sensible Speller* would have followed *Bank Street Writer* if it had been eligible.

One clue to the competitiveness of the word processing genre comes with a look at the average scores of the programs. None averaged less than 6.02, that score indicating that the program was one of the voters' five most favored titles of the year. As mentioned earlier, *Zardax* actually averaged a 9.00, meaning that it ranked as one of the top two programs in the voters' libraries. Nine programs had averages higher than 7.00 but lower than *Zardax*.

Those figures carry with them two implications: that the word processing market is not an area for faint-hearted publishers and that the Apple user is being well served by publishers in that area.

Weekly Reader Family Software placed three titles in the Home Education 10 to lead that category. Spinnaker Software scored a double. The winner was from The Learning Company—*Rocky's Boots*. *Computer SAT* from Harcourt Brace Jovanovich was second. The monthly sales leader in the category, *MasterType*, was not eligible for placement but still got enough votes to have finished fifth.

One of the oddities is that *Typing Tutor*, another of the usual sales leaders, didn't have enough support to rate in the top fifty educational programs, but that could have been awareness on the part of the voters that the program was too old to be eligible.

Multiplan bested *Quick File II* as the most favored Business entry in 1983. *The Incredible Jack* was third and *T.H.E. Spreadsheet* was fourth. *VisiCalc* and *PFS:File* would have followed *Quick File II* had they been eligible.

The Business 10 was another area where Apple owners generally showed their satisfaction with the products being offered. Fourteen programs had average votes that exceeded 7.00, led by *Agri-Ledger's* 9.80 rating.

Music Construction Set walked away with honors in the Home 10. Teenager Will Harvey's program had three times the points of second-place *Dollars and Sense*. *Money Street* just edged out *Micro Cookbook* for third. *ASCII Express* and *Home Accountant* would have followed fifth-place *Smartcom I* had they been eligible.

Sophie's Choice. As might have been expected, Beagle Bros domi-

nated the Hobby 10 list with six entries. The company's control of the category is so complete that one voter, reflecting this year's mounting election fever, suggested Bert Kersey for president and Mark Simonsen for vice president. Simonsen's *Double-Take* took top honors, with his *Beagle Basic* a comfortable second.

All the non-Beagle nominees were surprises. *Fontrix* nailed down fourth place and *KoalaPad Micro Illustrator* got fifth. *Diversi-DOS*, sold only by mail order, nailed seventh and the *Einstein Compiler* got eighth.

Highest ranking of the ineligible were *Copy II+* and *Graphics Magician*, which would have followed *KoalaPad* in the list.

Everyone's a Winner. Perhaps the best indication of the strength and depth of the Apple software market is that 261 different titles were cited by voters as being their favorite all-time programs. Even making allowances for the prejudices of authors and their mothers, that's an amazing number of software packages to be held in such high esteem.

Once again, it looks as though reports of the death of the Apple II market have been greatly exaggerated. ■

ALL-TIME TOP THIRTY

Rank	Last Year	Index	
1	1	303.49	Wizardry , Andrew Greenberg and Robert Woodhead, Sir-tech
2	25	98.84	Apple Writer II , Paul Lutus, Apple Computer
3	2	75.58	VisiCalc , Software Arts/Robert Frankston and Dan Bricklin, VisiCorp
4		73.26	Lode Runner , Doug Smith, Broderbund
5		68.60	Ultima III , Lord British, Origin Systems
6	3	47.67	Castle Wolfenstein , Silas Warner, Muse
7	4	44.19	Choplifter , Dan Gorlin, Broderbund
8	9	41.86	Zork I , Marc Blank, Timothy Anderson, Bruce Daniels, Scott Cutler, Joel Berez, and Dave Lebling, Infocom
9	8	33.72	Global Program Line Editor , Neil Konzen, Beagle Bros
10	6	27.91	Ultima II , Lord British, Sierra On-Line
11		26.74	Legacy of Lylgamyn , Robert Woodhead and Andrew Greenberg, Sir-tech
		26.74	Pinball Construction Set , Bill Budge, Electronic Arts
	5	26.74	ScreenWriter II , David Kidwell, Sierra On-Line
14	7	25.58	PFS:File , John Page and D.D. Roberts, Software Publishing
15		24.42	Multiplan , Microsoft
	26	24.42	WordStar , MicroPro
17		19.77	Bank Street Writer , Gene Kuzmiak and the Bank Street College of Education, Broderbund
		19.77	Copy II+ , Central Point Software
19	19	18.60	Graphics Magician , Chris Jochumson, David Lubar, and Mark Pelczarski, Penguin
20		15.12	Miner 2049er , Mike Livesay and Bill Hogue, Micro Lab
		15.12	Magic Window , Bill Depew, Artsci
22		13.95	Adventure , Crowther and Woods, Microsoft, Apple, and others
		13.95	Quick File II , Rupert Lissner, Apple Computer
		13.95	The Coveted Mirror , Eagle Berns and Holly Thomason, Penguin
25		12.79	Apple Mechanic , Bert Kersey, Beagle Bros
26		10.47	ASCII Express , Bill Blue and Mark Robbins, United Software Industries
		10.47	Flight Simulator , Bruce Artwick, SubLogic
		10.47	Hard Hat Mack , Michael Abbot and Matthew Alexander, Electronic Arts
15		10.47	Microsoft Decathlon , Tim Smith, Microsoft
		10.47	PIE Writer , Softwest, Hayden

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PROGRAMS THAT RECEIVED A FIRST-PLACE VOTE

Programs with no symbol received a first place vote for 1983 only. Programs preceded by a bullet received a first place vote in the All-Time category only. Starred programs received first-place votes in both categories.

APPLE III

- Apple Writer III
- ★ Catalyst
- ★ Condor III
- Keystroke Database
- ★ Quick File III
- ★ Think Tank III
- VisiCalc III
- ★ VisiCalc: Advanced Version
- ★ Word Juggler

APPLE II

- ★ Accountant
- Adventure
- ★ A.E.
- ★ Agri-Ledger
- Airsim-3
- Alien Typhoon
- Alpine Encounter
- Apple Cider Spider
- ★ Apple Logo
- ★ Apple Mechanic
- ★ Apple Panic
- Apple Pascal
- Apple Spice
- Apple IIe System Master
- ★ Apple Writer
- ★ Apple Writer II
- Aquatron
- ★ Arcade Machine
- ★ ASCII Express
- Axis Assassin
- ★ Aztec
- Business Information System
- ★ Bag of Tricks
- ★ Bandits
- ★ Bank Street Writer
- Basic Tutor
- Beagle Bag
- ★ Beagle Basic
- ★ Beneath Apple Manor
- ★ Bermuda Race
- ★ Bible Quiz
- ★ Big Mac Assembler
- ★ Bilestoad
- ★ Blood Quest
- ★ Bolo
- ★ Bomb Alley
- Bookends
- Bouncing Kamungas
- BPI General Accounting
- ★ BPI General Ledger
- ★ Broadsides
- ★ Burgertime
- CAD-1
- Carrier Combat
- ★ Castle Wolfenstein
- Cdex for VisiCalc
- ★ Chess 7.0
- Chiang Chest (Softdisk)
- ★ Chivalry
- ★ Choplifter
- ★ CIA
- Circascript
- ★ Complete Graphics System
- Compu-Scot

- Computer Air Combat
- Computer Ambush
- Computer Baseball
- Computer Quarterback
- ★ Computer SAT
- ComWare
- ★ Copy II+
- Cosmic Hangman
- ★ Coveted Mirror
- Cranston Manor
- Create-a-Test
- Creator
- Crisis Mountain
- Critical Mass
- Cropduster
- ★ Crossfire
- Crossword Magic
- Crush, Crumble & Chomp
- Crypt of Medea
- ★ Cubit
- Data Bank
- Data Basic
- Data Capture
- ★ Data Reporter
- Datacopia Scribe Word Processor
- Datafax
- David's Midnight Magic
- ★ DB Master
- ★ dBase II
- **Deadline**
- Death in the Caribbean
- Defender
- DFX
- DFX II
- Dictionary
- Dino Eggs
- Disk Fixer
- ★ Disk Muncher
- ★ Disk Recovery
- Diskinvoice
- ★ Diversi-DOS
- ★ Dollars and Sense
- Donkey Kong
- DOS 3.3
- DOS Boss
- DOS Tool Kit
- ★ Double-Take
- ★ Doublestuff
- Dragon's Keep
- Draw All
- ★ Drol
- E-Z Draw
- ★ Eagles
- Early Games for Young Children
- Early Games Music
- Earth Defender
- Easy Ledger
- Education Station
- Einstein Compiler
- Elementary, My Dear Apple
- Empire
- ★ **Enchanter**
- Epidemic
- Escape from Rungistan
- Essential Data Duplicator
- Evolution
- ★ Exodus: Ultima III
- Fantasyland 2041
- ★ Fighter Command

- First Class Mail
- ★ Flight Simulator
- ★ Flight Simulator II
- Flying Colors
- ★ Fontrix
- ★ Format II
- Frogger
- Galactic Adventures
- Galactic Empire
- GBBS II
- ★ General Manager
- ★ Geopolitique 1990
- ★ Germany 1985
- ★ Global Program Line Editor
- GraForth
- ★ Graphics Magician
- Grey Seas
- ★ Guadalcanal
- Gutenberg
- ★ Hard Hat Mack
- Health-Aide
- ★ Heartbeat
- Helper
- ★ Home Accountant
- ★ Homeword
- ★ In Search of the Most Amazing Thing
- ★ Incredible Jack
- ★ **Infidel**
- Instant Recall
- InvisiCalc
- ★ IPA #4
- IQ Baseball
- Jawbreaker II
- Juggle's Rainbow
- ★ Knight of Diamonds
- Knights of the Desert
- Knowledge Bowl
- ★ KoalaPad Micro Illustrator
- Kroll Wilder Commodity
- ★ Legacy of Lylgamyn
- List Handler
- ★ Locksmith
- ★ Lode Runner
- Lordlings
- Macro Mentor
- Magic Memory
- Magic Wand
- ★ Magic Window
- ★ Magicalc
- Management-Engineering
- Marauder
- ★ Mask of the Sun
- ★ Master Diagnostics
- ★ MasterType
- ★ Maze Craze Construction Set
- ★ Megawriter
- ★ Merlin
- ★ Micro Cookbook
- Micro Mother Goose
- ★ Microbe
- ★ Microsoft Decathlon
- Microterminal II
- Microwave
- ★ Microzine
- ★ Miner 2049er
- ★ Minit Man
- Missile Command
- Mission Impossible
- Mix and Match

- ★ Modula-2
- ★ Money Street
- ★ Multiplan
- muMath
- ★ Music Construction Set
- ★ Napoleon's Campaigns
- Neil's Game Disk
- New Step by Step
- ★ Nibbles Away
- Night Mission Pinball
- Normandy
- ★ North Atlantic
- Notebook
- Odyssey
- Old Ironsides
- ★ One-on-One
- Operation Apocalypse
- ★ ORCA/M
- Pensate
- Personal Finance Manager
- ★ PFS:File
- PFS:Report
- ★ PFS:Write
- ★ PIE Writer
- ★ Pinball Construction Set
- ★ **Planetfall**
- ★ Plato Foreign Languages
- ★ Portfolio
- Practical Accountant
- Print Whiz
- Program Line Editor
- Prisoner
- ★ ProDOS
- ★ Pronto-DOS
- Protrader
- Quest
- ★ Quick File
- ★ Quick TASC
- ★ Raster Blaster
- Reach for the Stars
- Rendezvous
- Repton
- Rescue Raiders
- Ribbit
- ★ Right Stuff
- Ringside Seat
- Robotron
- Robot War
- ★ Rocky's Boots
- Routine Machine
- Sabotage
- Sammy Lightfoot
- Santa Paravia and Fiumaccio
- ★ Sargon
- ★ Sargon II
- ★ Sargon III
- Scratch Pad
- ★ ScreenWriter II
- ★ Secret Agent
- ★ Sensible Speller
- Serpent's Star
- Serpentine
- ★ Sheila
- Sherwood Forest
- 6502: The Visible Computer
- ★ Smith Micro Stock Portfolio
- Snakebyte
- Sneakers
- Snooper Troops I

- Softdisk
- ★ Softerm
- ★ Space Vikings
- Spare Change
- Spelling Bee
- ★ Spitfire Simulator
- ★ Spreadsheet
- ★ Spy's Demise
- ★ Standing Stones
- Star Blazer
- Star Maze
- Star Raiders
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- Stargate
- Starting to Read
- ★ Stellar 7
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- Stickybear Basketbounce
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- ★ Super Speed Reading
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- ★ Threshold
- ★ Time Is Money
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- ★ Timeship
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- ★ Tuesday Morning Quarterback
- ★ Type Attack
- Typing Tutor
- Ultima
- ★ Ultima II
- Ultra Disk Copy
- Utopia Graphics
- VersaForm
- Videx VisiCalc Preboot
- ★ VisiCalc
- ★ VisiCalc: Advanced Version
- VisiDex
- VisiFile
- Watson
- Wavy Navy
- Weather Analyst
- ★ **Witness**
- ★ Wizardry
- ★ Word Handler
- ★ Word Juggler IIe
- ★ WordStar
- Write Away
- Zardax
- ★ Zaxxon
- ★ **Zork I**
- ★ **Zork II**
- ★ **Zork III**

SOFTLINE

VOLUME 3

SEPTEMBER-OCTOBER 1983

\$2.00

“don’t think you should go inside,” Floyd says. “We’ll need card there to fix computer. Hmmm . . . I know! Floyd will get card. Robots are tough. Nothing can hurt robots. You open the door, then Floyd will rush in. Then you close door. When Floyd knocks, open door again. Okay? Go!”

Open the door.

Floyd plunges into the bio lab. Immediately, he is set upon by hideous, mutated monsters! More are heading straight toward the open door! Floyd shrieks and yells to you to close the door.

Close the door.

From within the lab you hear ferocious growlings, the sounds of a skirmish, and then

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(continued from the cover)

a high-pitched metallic scream.

>Wait.

Time passes. . . . You hear three fast knocks, followed by the distinctive sound of tearing metal.

>Open the door.

Floyd stumbles out of the bio lab, clutching the mini-booth card. The mutations rush toward the open doorway!

>Close the door.

Not a moment too soon! You hear a pounding from the door as the monsters within vent their frustration at losing their prey.

Floyd is badly torn apart, with loose wires and broken circuits everywhere. Oil flows from his lubrication system.

You drop to your knees and cradle Floyd's head in your lap. Floyd looks up at you with half-open eyes.

"Floyd did it . . . got card. Floyd a good friend, huh?"

Floyd smiles with contentment, and then his eyes close. You sit in silence for a moment over the brave friend who gave his life that you might live.

Floyd was a good robot. He was helpful. He was courageous. He was fun-loving. Your friend is gone and you're alone. How do you feel?

You don't feel like that very often. Maybe after you read *Charlotte's Web*. Maybe when they shot Bambi's mother. Maybe when Raskolnikov got religion in the Siberian slave labor camp. But this scene is from a computer game. A game!

The rising level of sophistication in the adventure game—that most sophisticated of entertainments ever to pass through a central processing unit—has faintly threatened to take it out of the computer junkies' realm of private delight and toss it into the center ring of popular culture, along with books, plays, and movies. Can it absorb the culture shock and continue to develop and transcend standards that are already high, or will it be homogenized, simplified, and forced to satisfy the lowest common social denominator? What's on teevee tonight?

The following is a discourse on the true meaning of interactive fiction . . . participatory computer prose . . . ultra adventure . . . whatever . . . by people who ought to know. They discuss what has been, what may be, and what am. On some points, there is no argument. On others, they all agree to disagree. We've invited them all to a party at midnight next Friday, to be held in an old mansion on a remote island in the Pacific. A sheer cliff surrounds it on three sides. The southern half is a wild game preserve. . . .

The condensed excerpt is from *Planetfall*, by Steve Meretzky, copyright 1983 by Infocom.

Okay, Cue the Genius

By Fred Saberhagen

Fred Saberhagen is the author of more than twenty science-fiction novels. With his wife, Joan, he has cofounded Berserker Works Limited, a company engaged in converting the works of science-fiction and fantasy authors into computer games. Here, he helps give us a little . . . perspective.

Suppose that in some alternate universe you are William Shakespeare. Strolling about London one day in the late sixteenth century, mulling over plans for your next novel, you come upon some workmen erecting a large wooden structure of peculiar shape. The design of the building strikes you as inappropriate for either a dwelling or a place of business.

A few questions gain you some information about a recent invention (this is an alternate universe, remember) called the "play." Live people, sometimes costumed and in makeup, are getting up on a flat surface called a "stage" and *acting out stories!*

The clever people who have designed and built the first stages, as well as the inventors of acting, are right in there writing and directing the best plays they can come up with. (At least the best they can come up with in their spare time—each of these people necessarily has one or two active careers already going.)

In one of the earliest successful plays, dummies representing invading aliens (Frenchmen, perhaps, or Spaniards, from across the channel) were lowered on ropes from concealed positions above the stage, while the actor (this play needed only one) ran back and forth, following shouted directions from the audience, trying to shoot all the dummies before they touched the floor. The audience liked this play a lot and cheered it enthusiastically.

In a somewhat more recent show, also very popular, the lead actor climbs about on a crazy scaffolding of planks and ladders, trying to accomplish some rather simple-minded tasks, while others costumed as fantastic creatures try to knock him off by throwing barrels. It's good slapstick fun, and the audiences love it.

"Wait a minute," you say to these eager people who have been proudly explaining how plays work. "Wait a minute. That all sounds amusing, yes. But I really think you're on to something bigger. Let me go home and think about this for a while. . . . How many people can you get onstage at once? How many lines can an actor memorize? Can you have it dark on one half of the stage and light on the other half?"

Planetfall and The Witness**Infocom Does It Again...
And Again**

**Monte Schultz and
Steve Arrants**

With each new release, each new venture into a genre they have made famous, the people at Infocom, authors of *Zork* and *Deadline*, seem to reaffirm a commitment to a level of quality and innovation that has guaranteed them not only a fiercely loyal following, but also an undisputed position at the forefront of the computer adventure market.

Being in such a position can have its drawbacks, not the least of which is striving to maintain the level of quality and excellence for which they are known. Thus far this year, with the releases of Michael Berlyn's *Suspended* and Stu Galley's *The Witness*, they have done nothing but strengthen their position. And now there is *Planetfall*, a new science fiction adventure by another first time Infocom author, Steve Meretsky.

Planetfall

Planetfall is as remarkable, funny, perplexing, and entertaining a game as you are likely to find anywhere. It begins with

**Like Zork, Planetfall
is big—more than
100 rooms.**

you, a lowly ensign seventh class, scrubbing deck nine of the Stellar Patrol Ship Feinstein. Thanks to a certain Ensign First Class Blather, this tour of duty has not been everything you had hoped it might be. However, things are about to take an unexpected turn and not necessarily for the better.

Cast alone into space, you soon find yourself marooned on one of two twin islands in the middle of the strange water-covered planet working hard just to find a little food and a safe place to sleep. As night falls on the first day, and you prepare to bed down in a large empty dormitory, you will have wandered about and mapped most of a huge complex called Kalamontee.



When you wake again, the real adventure begins as you try to discover why the complex was apparently abandoned and what happened to those who were there before you.

In your search for answers to these and other questions, you will find a friend, a robot named Floyd, who will prove to be as good and true a companion to you as E.T. was to Elliot.

Clearly, the most imaginative and cleverly written part of the entire game, Floyd, besides being hysterically funny through most of the adventure, evokes in the player of *Planetfall* authentic feelings of affection and attachment. Indeed, Floyd is critical to finishing the game in terms of being a large part of the solution to three major problems in *Planetfall* besides lending his own brand of moral support to the stranded and baffled adventurer.

Like *Zork*, *Planetfall* is big—more than 100 rooms and much of the fun of the game is found in exploring the vast twin complexes of Kalamontee and Lawanda. In fact, each area of *Planetfall* seems to lead you on to the next, holding your attention yet never becoming so obscure as to drain your enthusiasm.

The level of difficulty is, of course, subjective; it took me 30 to 40 hours to acquire all 80 points, thanks mostly to a

disastrous oversight in mapping, two red herrings, and one particularly challenging puzzle near the end of the game. Still, the solutions to the more difficult puzzles never quite seem unattainable, so the hours spent locked to the computer do not feel wasted.

The puzzles in *Planetfall* are, for the most part, of an interactive nature, meaning that objects like special access cards, keys, and other tools must be combined in a

creative computing SOFTWARE PROFILE

Name: Planetfall

Type: Text adventure

System: Apple, Atari, IBM PC,
Commodore 64, TRS-80

Format: Disk

Summary: Best entry level adventure from Infocom. Logical, funny, entertaining.

Price: \$49.95

Manufacturer:

Infocom, Inc.
55 Wheeler St.
Cambridge, MA 02138

variety of ways to find solutions to the problems presented.

Fortunately, this game has probably the most logical and straightforward puzzles of any Infocom adventure, so patience and perseverance are rewarded without any unnecessary reliance on sheer luck.

In terms of danger, there are few instances in this game where the player runs the risk of happening upon the kind of gratuitous death one finds in both the *Zork* trilogy and *Starcross*. The risks one takes in *Planetfall* are ones for which he can prepare, and in most cases only carelessness evokes the standard ***You have died*** response from the program.

Text IS Fine

Planetfall is a perfect argument in favor of text adventures. The detail present in the descriptions—that which is provided for the mind to see—and those special parts of the game that produce a kind of running action, would simply appear like so many Saturday morning cartoons on a hi-res screen, effectively weakening both the excitement and the drama in those sequences. Though, again, this type of game requires more than a passive involvement from the player and indeed, will not give up many of its secrets without both an intellectual and imaginative investment from the player. For my part, as

If you do find a likely suspect, it is possible that a jury will release him because your evidence is not compelling.

in reading a good book, this is as it should be.

The documentation for *Planetfall* includes, among other things, a manual and a very funny diary. The manual especially is well worth reading since the people at Infocom tell me that the majority of problems stranded adventurers ask for hints on can be avoided by a careful examination of the command and advice instructions. (I say this from experience having spent at least a month longer than I should have in the Riddle Room of *Zork II* through a failure to read carefully the instructions for speaking to other characters in the game.)

To my mind, *Planetfall*, is the most entertaining Infocom program yet, particularly on the first time through. It has a liveliness to it that never seems to falter, and the ending is without a doubt the most satisfying yet.

First time author Steve Meretsky has written a game that is most of all fun to play, which is really what these games are all about. As an entry level game for those who have yet to try one of Infocom's adventures, *Planetfall* deserves a large audience. —MS

The Witness

Many Infocom games include maps, clues, and other devices that help you in the game. *Witness* includes a telegram, a suicide note, a pack of matches, a newspaper front page, and an issue of *National Detective* magazine which contains hints for playing the game.

Witness is a murder mystery that takes place in 1938. An interesting twist on this theme is that the murder takes place while you are talking to the victim! You can't prevent the murder—that would make for a short game. You must discover who the murderer is and gather enough evidence for a conviction. It isn't enough to have

Infocom has come up with another fine game with *Witness*. They really have no competition. No other text adventure game has such a sophisticated parser. Most only allow the input of simple commands. Infocom's innovative parser lets you link commands in one sentence, making the game seem more natural and life-like.

Their packaging of games is also innovative. Whether it is *Witness*, *Deadline*, *Suspended*, or *Starcross*, the package of each game is related to the action. *Witness* has clues in a police file. *Suspended* has a map of the underground complex in which it takes place and markers for the robots, in addition to memos from the director of



some evidence and a strong hunch. You must prove beyond a reasonable doubt that the accused committed a murder.

The game begins as you are called to the mansion of a Mr. Linder. His wife recently committed suicide, and her ex-lover has threatened to kill Linder. While you are in the mansion, Linder is killed. The ex-lover is seen running through the woods behind the house. Did he commit the murder? Is the case closed? Monica, Linder's daughter and the Oriental butler seem to be involved in the case. Where? How? What secrets are they hiding?

As the red herrings begin to pile up, you race against the clock to solve this difficult case. You can question the suspects, but if you are too aggressive or too fawning, you will not get far. Suspects can also lie, whether they are guilty or innocent. You must discover the truth about Linder, his wife, her lover, and the murderer.

You have an assistant who performs laboratory analysis on fingerprints and other evidence. If you find yourself in a tough spot, he will even help save your life.

If you do find a likely suspect, it is possible that a jury will release him because your evidence is not compelling. Make sure that you have an iron-clad case or a murderer may be set free.

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the complex.

Getting you into the right frame of mind is as important as the playability of a game. Infocom is rare in that it believes this philosophy.

Witness is not for a beginner at text games. I solved the mystery through luck rather than hard detective work. It may take you quite a long time to solve this case. If you have ever longed to work with Philip Marlowe, Miss Marple, or Lord Peter Wimsey, *Witness* is the next best thing. —SA

END

creative computing SOFTWARE PROFILE

Name: The Witness

Type: Mystery

System: Apple II+, IIe

Format: Disk

Language: Machine

Summary: Tough, involving, and a winner.

Price: \$49.95

Manufacturer:

Infocom, Inc.
55 Wheeler St.
Cambridge, MA 02138

Planetfall and The Witness**Infocom Does It Again...
And Again**

**Monte Schultz and
Steve Arrants**

With each new release, each new venture into a genre they have made famous, the people at Infocom, authors of *Zork* and *Deadline*, seem to reaffirm a commitment to a level of quality and innovation that has guaranteed them not only a fiercely loyal following, but also an undisputed position at the forefront of the computer adventure market.

Being in such a position can have its drawbacks, not the least of which is striving to maintain the level of quality and excellence for which they are known. Thus far this year, with the releases of Michael Berlyn's *Suspended* and Stu Galley's *The Witness*, they have done nothing but strengthen their position. And now there is *Planetfall*, a new science fiction adventure by another first time Infocom author, Steve Meretsky.

Planetfall

Planetfall is as remarkable, funny, perplexing, and entertaining a game as you are likely to find anywhere. It begins with

**Like *Zork*, *Planetfall*
is big—more than
100 rooms.**

you, a lowly ensign seventh class, scrubbing deck nine of the Stellar Patrol Ship Feinstein. Thanks to a certain Ensign First Class Blather, this tour of duty has not been everything you had hoped it might be. However, things are about to take an unexpected turn and not necessarily for the better.

Cast alone into space, you soon find yourself marooned on one of two twin islands in the middle of the strange water-covered planet working hard just to find a little food and a safe place to sleep. As night falls on the first day, and you prepare to bed down in a large empty dormitory, you will have wandered about and mapped most of a huge complex called Kalamontee.



When you wake again, the real adventure begins as you try to discover why the complex was apparently abandoned and what happened to those who were there before you.

In your search for answers to these and other questions, you will find a friend, a robot named Floyd, who will prove to be as good and true a companion to you as E.T. was to Elliot.

Clearly, the most imaginative and cleverly written part of the entire game, Floyd, besides being hysterically funny through most of the adventure, evokes in the player of *Planetfall* authentic feelings of affection and attachment. Indeed, Floyd is critical to finishing the game in terms of being a large part of the solution to three major problems in *Planetfall* besides lending his own brand of moral support to the stranded and baffled adventurer.

Like *Zork*, *Planetfall* is big—more than 100 rooms and much of the fun of the game is found in exploring the vast twin complexes of Kalamontee and Lawanda. In fact, each area of *Planetfall* seems to lead you on to the next, holding your attention yet never becoming so obscure as to drain your enthusiasm.

The level of difficulty is, of course, subjective; it took me 30 to 40 hours to acquire all 80 points, thanks mostly to a

disastrous oversight in mapping, two red herrings, and one particularly challenging puzzle near the end of the game. Still, the solutions to the more difficult puzzles never quite seem unattainable, so the hours spent locked to the computer do not feel wasted.

The puzzles in *Planetfall* are, for the most part, of an interactive nature, meaning that objects like special access cards, keys, and other tools must be combined in a

creative computing SOFTWARE PROFILE

Name: Planetfall

Type: Text adventure

System: Apple, Atari, IBM PC,
Commodore 64, TRS-80

Format: Disk

Summary: Best entry level adventure from Infocom. Logical, funny, entertaining.

Price: \$49.95

Manufacturer:

Infocom, Inc.
55 Wheeler St.
Cambridge, MA 02138

THE FAST-EVOLVING
WORLD
OF
INTERACTIVE
FICTION

NEW GAMES, NEW WORLDS

"Floyd . . . I felt terrible when he was killed. Every move I made I expected Floyd to bump into me or go exploring. I began to miss his constant chatter . . . the way he said ' . . . are we gonna try something dangerous now?' . . . and his lopsided grin . . . the electric shock when I kissed him. I fell into massive depression . . ."

Ah, the wonders of fiction! It can grab you, transport you to another world, and make you believe in—and what's more care about—something as uncaring as a robot (in this case named Floyd), and a fictional robot at that. Delightful, you say, but not unusual; any good book can do the same. The opening quotation isn't a reaction to a book, though. It's one of many letters to Infocom about one of its more recent games, *Planetfall*; and, as such, it's a measure of a rapidly evolving category of computer software called interactive fiction.

Born in the vast Underground Empire of *Zork*, and owing a significant debt to *Wizardry* (Sir-Tech Software, Inc.), the most popular piece of software ever produced for the Apple, interactive fiction is rapidly developing into a new communication (should we say literary?) form. Users must decide whether or not it has yet arrived, but in the next 12 months, several pieces of software will no doubt appear that leave the ax-wielding trolls and magic spells far behind. By and large, this software will try to involve you in something more than puzzles; and, like the robot Floyd, it may even touch your heart.

Puzzles, Prose, and Graphics

The key to this change is a rapid evolution from games created solely by programmers to new efforts based on the work of some of the best science-fiction authors of our time—Arthur C. Clarke, Michael Crichton, Ray Bradbury, Douglas Adams, Robert Heinlein—as well as some of the best-loved children's classics, such as *Swiss Family Robinson*, *Wind in the Willows*, and *The Wizard of Oz*.

At the same time, a switch in marketing strategy will include a new emphasis on packaging, using bookstores as outlets, and capturing a new audience with familiar titles. Furthermore, this may just be the beginning. We may be looking at the nickelodeon of computer-delivered fiction. Future efforts could involve multiple users in a world that is largely of their own creation, and the tools of that involvement could include biofeedback, which aids the de-

velopment of a story by monitoring reactions that users may not even be aware of (or only vaguely so), such as increased pulse rate.

I'm jumping ahead just a bit, though. Interactive fiction begins with programmers' inherent love of puzzles, as expressed in *Adventure*, the first adventure game, which was developed on mainframe computers in the 1960s at Massachusetts Institute of Technology and Stanford. Apple enthusiasts got their first real taste of adventuring when *Zork* arrived in 1980. *Zork* resembles the mainframe adventure in many ways. It has no plot. The environment is part logic, part fantasy. The goal is simple—you explore the world, map it piece by piece, collect treasures, and thus accumulate points. What sets *Zork* aside, however, is the richness of its prose and the wonderful sense of humor of its writers, who seem to have anticipated an incredible number of possibilities.

Since *Zork's* introduction, companies that produce interactive-fiction roughly divide into two camps—those who write text-only programs (Infocom), and those who support their adventures with graphics (nearly all others).

"There's a place for graphics," says Jonathan Palace, one of the editors at Infocom, "but they take up so much room on the disk that the text can't be as long or as colorful as it can be without graphics."

The Infocom party line has always been that "your brain is the best graphics generator" and that computer graphics, at this point, are simply not good enough to significantly enhance its products.

In contrast, Mark Pelezarski, president of Penguin Software, which has produced some of the best graphics adventure games, feels graphics definitely enhance the game. "We have a lot of things in a picture that test your powers of imagination," says Pelezarski. In fact, to get through a Penguin game such as *Transylvania*, you have to study the pictures for clues that exist nowhere else.

Most of the new games will continue

ADRIAN DAY

to use a mixture of text and graphics, as do Penguin's. But whether the games are text or a mixture of text and graphics, two major trends are worth noting:

- A move away from strict puzzle solving and into plot and character development.
- Use of successful fiction writers and proven stories.

These trends are evident in the development of Infocom's line, but the last few months should mark a turning point of sorts, with several new offerings in the field from other companies.

As Palace describes it, Zork is made up of puzzles, with no plot or character development. With Infidel and later games, the puzzles were part of a story, or a series of puzzles made up a story. Witness shows real scene development. Written in the tone of a 1930s detective novel, the goal is "to simulate the experience of being in Southern California in 1938," says Palace. That's a routine goal for fiction, but a giant step for adventure games. Now Infocom has just released Cutthroats, a tale that places you in a treasure hunt with some pretty seedy companions, and it is working with Douglas Adams to bring out a game based on his novel *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy*.

The *Washington Post* described the book version of *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy* as "inspired lunacy," which is also a good way to describe Zork. Thus, Adams and Infocom should be a natural team. (Adams approached Infocom with the idea.) The result will be more a story than a puzzle, says Palace, and "more enjoyable than the book."

Tempting a Broader Public

What lies ahead, says Palace, is a new product, as yet untitled, that involves no scoring and gives players no choice but to follow through on their actions. (It won't have a "save game" feature, which adventurers often use to ward off disaster. Such a feature holds a copy of a game at a specific point so adventurers can take a dangerous action without fear of losing all they've done so far.) The new product will offer many possible actions, "some of which are good, many of which are bad, many of which are ambiguous." There won't be a single path to success, but many.

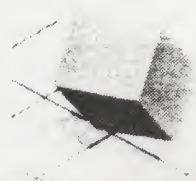
The editors at Infocom are trying to find where the enjoyment lies—in solving difficult puzzles or just in wandering through the story. "And that's a hard question to answer," says Palace. "Some people like the hardest puzzles we can come up with, but others find

the puzzle aspect frustrating."

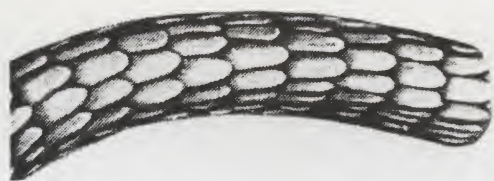
Infocom isn't the only company looking for an answer. Penguin and others plan to stick with the puzzles while developing other aspects of the medium, but at least three new lines of software are just beginning to test the taste of a broader public—those from Baen Enterprises and two subsidiaries of Spinnaker Software, Trillium and Windham Classics.

New-World Authors

Trillium has an impressive stable of writers and titles, some just recently in-



GETTING LONG-TERM INTERACTION BETWEEN USERS AND FICTIONAL CHARACTERS ISN'T EASY.



troduced and others on the way.

"We attempted to go to the people who are best at creating new worlds," says Trillium brand manager Seth Godin. If you're a science-fiction fan, the list has got to set your mouth watering.

Familiar works blossoming into interactive fiction include Clarke's *Rendezvous with Rama*, Heinlein's *Starman Jones*, and Ray Bradbury's *Fahrenheit 451*. Michael Crichton, author of *The Andromeda Strain* and other novels, has developed a story just for interactive fiction called Amazon. (One of Trillium's first releases, Amazon presents a helpful companion, a parrot called Paco, for whom you quickly develop a strong attachment.)

Rama is a space ark that arrives for a short spin around the sun. It is apparently a dead world, and in Clarke's book you follow the actions of a small team that explores it. In the book, though, the team doesn't always look at the things you might want to examine. They don't always ask the questions you might ask. In the computer version, you'll do the exploring—up to a point. Obviously, limited disk space inhibits the inclusion of every alternative.

"Some things the book doesn't do as well, some things it does better," says Godin. As with all the Trillium releases, this one will include graphics. Trillium isn't afraid to inject a page or two of pure text, however. As for puzzles, "they're great if they fit into the plot," says Godin, "but a lot of times they don't. In Rama there are puzzles, but they add to the plot or the characters."

Trillium has also tried to increase user involvement by rewarding users for acting in character. In *Dragon World* you play a shy adventurer who wouldn't hurt a fly. When a crying woman blocks your way in a cave, you must keep your character in mind if you hope to get by.

Getting long-term interaction between users and fictional characters isn't easy, though, says Godin. "Paco (in Amazon) is a parrot. He can say stupid things; he can repeat himself all the time." You can't have a fictional person behaving that way.

Characters You Care About

Still, you can expect to see some interaction. In the Windham Classic version of *The Wizard of Oz*, for example, you are Dorothy, and you can ask questions of the Scarecrow, the Tin Man, and the Cowardly Lion.

Other titles being brought out under this name offer some interesting situations that should help break new ground and cultivate more markets for interactive fiction. In *Wind in the Willows*, you start the game as Mole, then later become Toad. *Swiss Family Robinson* contains a built-in mapping feature, and your goal is basically the same as that of the marooned family—learn how to survive on an island by yourself.

These games aren't aimed at "hard-core adventure players," points out Thomas C. Pavela, brand manager. "One of the things we're trying to do is make these friendly and accessible." Of course, one of the keys is to start with friendly and accessible titles, which Trillium has done. Besides the titles already mentioned, the line includes *Treasure Island* and *Below the Root*. The latter, based on the Green Sky Trilogy, is joystick-driven with a text menu that includes some of the interactive commands found in more traditional adventure games.

Another company that has tapped well-known authors and works is Baen Enterprises. When asked how you build user involvement, Jim Baen replied, "The text isn't done by programmers, but by writers, and their whole purpose

in life is to make you care about characters." He acknowledges that "you can't paint as textured and rich a canvas as you can in a book, but the medium offers much more in variability. Your feelings and approach have much more of an effect on the outcome."

Science-fiction author Fred Saberhagen helped design and program the firm's first offering, *Wings out of Shadow*, a game that draws on Saberhagen's *Berserker* series. In this one it's possible to "die" and yet have won the game. Heinlein's *Glory Road* is a game in which one of your tasks is to make sure your sidekicks, Star and Rufus, stay alive. "If they die, there ain't no way you're going to win," says Baen. He describes Star as a "rollicking wench" and Rufus as her uncle.

Look for different approaches in these games. Baen talks of games that "explode on you . . . You think you're in the middle of an adventure and suddenly you're playing a reflex game." *Wings out of Shadow* contains four subgames, and variables from each are passed to the next. One is a maze, one is a strategy-and-tactics game, and two involve arcade action. Baen believes that as people watch television or read a good novel, they go into a trancelike state. In *Wings out of Shadow*, each of the sequences tries to bring you in a little deeper.

How Deep Can It All Get?

Everyone wants to improve the language the games understand. Using tested writers may improve some of the prose the game throws onto the screen, but it takes memory and good programming to create a game that understands more than simple, two-word commands, such as climb ladder, or go north. Here Infocom has always had the edge with a parser that understands nouns, verbs, adjectives, and direct and indirect objects. Infocom has its own language, based on LISP, that is still evolving.

There are other ways to respond, however. Penguin, for example, is developing a game composed entirely of graphics for the Macintosh, says Pelezarski. "You'll be put in locations, and you'll point to things that you want to take, or look at, or manipulate."

As to graphics, Godin looks to the day when we'll be interacting with images of actors on video disks and you'll be "able to move your feet and arms. It will be one step short of *Westworld*," he says, referring to the movie that portrayed a fantastic entertainment park containing humanoids that helped

guests live out their fantasies.

As to biofeedback, why not wear a little ring that connects to the computer and gives it information on your pulse rate? The game could change accordingly. "Ok, we got him really excited now, so zap him," says Baen with glee.

Baen is thinking in terms of optical disks and a "novel that would evolve in terms of what you discover . . . it would require the wordage of four or five novels and a tremendous amount of coding time—more now than the user environment can support."

An Ideal Fictional Form

If the marketplace would support it, if the technology were all in place, and if the artistic skills had evolved to match the medium, what then?

Baen answers, "an ideal fictional form that would include prose that would change in terms of what you wanted it to do, or even in terms of what you thought you wanted it to do, and the picture that went along with it would be a motion picture and would involve the same sort of thing." It would be, in short, "like an illustrated book that died and went to heaven."

Amen.

+

► FURTHER INFORMATION

Baen Enterprises
Simon & Schuster, Inc. (distributor)
Simon & Schuster Building
1230 Avenue of the Americas
New York, NY 10020
(212) 245-6400

CIRCLE 515 ON READER SERVICE CARD

Infocom, Inc.
55 Wheeler Street
Cambridge, MA 02138
(617) 492-1031

CIRCLE 516 ON READER SERVICE CARD

Penguin Software
830 Fourth Avenue
P.O. Box 311
Geneva, IL 60134
(312) 232-1984

CIRCLE 517 ON READER SERVICE CARD

Sir-Tech Software, Inc.
6 Main Street
Ogdensburg, NY 13669
(315) 393-6633

CIRCLE 518 ON READER SERVICE CARD

Trillium Corporation and Windham Classics
Spinnaker Software
215 First Street
Cambridge, MA 02142
(617) 868-4700

CIRCLE 519 ON READER SERVICE CARD

GAMELINE

Planetfall

By Steve Meretzky.

Apple, Atari, Commodore, DEC, IBM, NEC, Osborne, TI, TRS-80. *Planetfall* departs somewhat from Infocom's previous science-fiction fare. The heroes of *Starcross* and *Suspended* were an asteroid miner exploring the solar system in a one-man spacecraft and a man awakened from cryogenic suspension to save a planet from its own malfunctioning control systems. The character whose part you play in *Planetfall* is more of a comic antihero; the setting you find yourself in at the outset is reminiscent of Douglas Adams's *Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy*. A life that otherwise might be viewed as glorious and exciting—that of an officer in the Stellar Patrol—is treated satirically, shown for what it really is (or could be): pure drudgery.

Aboard the *Feinstein*, you are an ensign of the lowest class, assigned deck-scrubbing duty by your malicious superior, Ensign Blather. This tour of duty is punctuated by the arrival of an alien ambassador, who, after giving you a tourist brochure about his planet, walks off leaving a trail of highly scrub-resistant slime. That's a high point of life on the *Feinstein*.

Fortunately—for us, the ensign, and the story line—there is hope for excitement in the Stellar Patrol. The ship blows up after not too much more deck scrubbing, and you find yourself in an automated escape pod—thrust upon your own devices, so to speak—plunging into the atmosphere of a nearby planet. After enduring the ordeal of a rocky landing followed by an unplanned splashdown, you fight your way to an alien shore. The planet was a human colony but seems to be uninhabited now. The first order of business is survival. Several abandoned dormitories give you a place to sleep and hang your spacesuit, but finding food becomes more difficult once you run out of the multicolored goo you found in your survival kit.

Planetfall is a game of discovery. If your first concern is survival, your second is probably getting back to civilization. A third goal is to discover what happened to the people on this planet. The more you discover—especially as you come across certain disturbing pieces of evidence—the more important this goal becomes.

Your first discovery is a little robot named Floyd. It is uncertain what Floyd was built for. His typical response to any request for help is "Enough talk. Let's play hide-and-seek!" Floyd appears at first to be little more than an amusing diversion, a cybernetic puppy dog. Friendly and loyal, but not too bright. Still, among his playful ramblings there are bits of computerized wisdom, clues, and insights. (When you save the game, he says, "Oh, boy, are we gonna do something dangerous now?")

Like its predecessors, *Planetfall* is also a game of repairing machines and figuring out how to use them. Broken machines are common in the worlds of Infocom, and repairing them is necessary to set the world right. These puzzles are of planetary importance. Though they're often as simple as replacing burnt-out parts, there's usually a certain twist. The material or procedure necessary for the repair isn't always obvious. The final puzzles are more interesting and require intelligence and imagination to solve.

The situation you find yourself in, though it starts on the absurd side, becomes increasingly poignant. The puzzles are good; the character of Floyd is great. The climax is exciting, but you may find the denouement a letdown. Not that it isn't enough: It's too much. Instead of neatly tying things up, telling you the results of your actions, and logically concluding the unresolved plot elements, the ending goes a step too far, indulging in unabashed adolescent wish fulfillment. Although *Planetfall*, like the other Infocom games, raises the level of the adventure to something approaching interac-

tive literature, the ending of this game reads more like a fairy tale. The game is excellent. You can always rewrite the final paragraphs in your own mind to make it a satisfying piece of fiction.

DD
Apple II, II Plus, IIe; 48K. Atari 400, 800, or 1200; 32K. Commodore. DEC. IBM pc. NEC. Osborne. TI Professional. TRS-80, Models I or III. \$49.95 from Infocom, 55 Wheeler Street, Cambridge, MA 02138; (617) 492-1031.

Zaxxon

Versions by John Garcia, Ron J. Fortier, Jim Ratcliff, and Steve Bjork.

Apple, Atari, Radio Shack. "Mission Command to attack leader. Zaxxon's fortress should be coming into your range now. Switching to manual control; begin your attack run. Good luck."

"Roger, Command. I'll continue to transmit as long as I can."

"The gun emplacements are low, arranged in a crossfire. They can be avoided by flying above them, but at this altitude I won't be able to do any damage or hit the fuel tanks I need to complete this mission."

"I'm beginning a strafing run now."

Against a blinding barrage of fire the lone ship dove lower, relying on its speed to avoid the heavy gunfire.

"I've knocked out one of their radars and several gun emplacements. . . . Oh no, they're launching rockets. One right under me. I don't think I can get out—"

A new movie from George Lucas? A laundry detergent? A killer play in Scrabble?

Arcade maniacs have known the answer for more than a year, and now computer crazies can share that information. Zaxxon is a superb three-dimensional computer game that impressively exploits the computer's multicolored high-resolution graphics and neatly gets around the scrolling limitations of Apple and Radio Shack.

Not since *Choplifter* has a game looked so impressive. Zaxxon's color display is awesome, and its finely detailed images make excellent use of perspective. The sound effects are authentic, rather than superfluous; the player genuinely feels like the occupant of a pressurized plane cockpit.

The fighter spacecraft pilot's mission is to destroy the deadly Zaxxon Robot. (Why the robot is considered "deadly" is never explained. It's been perfectly peaceful until now; it didn't sew razor blades into everybody's underwear; you just burst into this poor machine's territory and blast it to smithereens.)

The playing field is a bird's-eye view of a long, narrow course with a vanishing point beyond the screen's upper right corner (imagine a bowling alley viewed from the ceiling). Flying straight actually means moving at a forty-five-degree angle.

After making it through the first section—a space fortress filled with grounded enemy planes (which fire back in spite of their immobility), radar towers, gun emplacements (which fire horizontally at ground level), and base missiles (which fire vertically)—it's off to outer space, in which planes not destroyed in the fortress scramble for a dogfight. Because of the difficulty of judging three dimensions on a two-dimensional screen, the enemy planes are nearly impossible to defeat—there are no objects, therefore no reference points, in outer space. (At least not in Atari/Radio Shack outer space. In the Apple universe, there are lots of colorful planets and twinkly stars to help you out.) The conservative approach is perhaps best; flying in the bottom left-hand corner will get the player through this segment with a minimum of combat.

The second fortress is much like the first, except that walls are topped by force fields that leave only a narrow hole through which the player must fly. The altimeter (a green gauge on the left of the screen) is invaluable in this sequence. Once through the seven walls

man forces must race against time and the harsh conditions of desert warfare.

Full-color hi-res graphics depict various British and Axis units and show a portion of the battle area at a time in the now familiar hexagonal grid. Terrain includes strategic towns, rough areas, mountains, impassable desert, and coastal areas. The cursor serves to select units for identification and movement. The battle area screen may be scrolled using the cursor, or an aggregated, hi-res view of the entire North African Theater may be selected.

Unit types include garrisons, infantry, motorized infantry, and tanks. Each individual historic unit is separately rated for morale, actual strength, and maximum strength. One very nice touch is the introduction of standard military symbols to depict unit types, with crosses denoting unit size. During battle, units may be given varying levels of attack intensity and risk, with corresponding levels of risk introduced during battle. Stacking of units in the same hex is allowed.

The game system introduces a new and welcome innovation, the use of multiple-phase turns in which each player has a limited opportunity to react during the opponent's game turn. This offers a far more realistic simulation of the ebb and flow of actual battle than the more rigidly alternating game turns. Air power, while not present in the game as discrete combat units, may be allocated through air points and act as a modifier, influencing the odds of battle between ground forces.

Game play may be halted and saved to disk at the end of each turn. Should you require a capable opponent on short notice, provision has been made for solitaire play, with the computer commanding the British forces.

Game play is relatively quick. Provision has been made to select rapidly all friendly units for movement or battle orders. Unlike in the game system employed in SSI's more sophisticated *Germany 1985*, no provision has been made to order a unit to a specific area or location except to home base and to Tobruk.

Knights of the Desert is a game of quick, slashing movement. Initiative is vital to effect victory. As in the historical campaign, the battle may ebb and flow across the deserts many times before final resolution. For the Axis forces, supply allocation is critical. The amount of supplies successfully running the British blockade will vary according to the historic supply rate prevalent at the time. Secure supply bases must be established by both players to support advancing troops and armor. Combat, movement, and fortifications all consume precious supplies and take their toll as surely as the foe.

SSI lists *Knights of the Desert* as an intermediate-level game. With innovative game play, several minigame scenarios, and options for various skill levels, *Knights of the Desert* is a worthy war game. WWW

Knights of the Desert, by Tactical Design Group, Strategic Simulations (883 Stierlin Road, Building A-200, Mountain View, CA 94043; 415-964-1353). \$39.95.

Planetfall. By Steve Meretzky. If you pet Floyd, he snuggles up to you; if you leave him, he runs to catch up, shouting, "Hey, wait for Floyd!" He loves to play, but he'll give his life for you. Incidentally, he's a robot.

Planetfall is a science-fiction text adventure, and it's also a comedy. Lots of the lines and descriptions will make you laugh, but Floyd will only make you smile—and care. Floyd is the star, although the player represents the hero. Floyd puts robots in the same category with children and animals; they're masters at upstaging. You see? He's just upstaged Steve Meretzky's humor.

The story takes place in the 210th century; it begins with the malfunction and explosion of a patrol starship, which our hero survives if you're clever. He lands on a planet that seems deserted. With him, you get to explore a large research complex of a unique civilization that appears to have been cut off suddenly, much like Pompeii, discovering its habits and values and goals. You also discover its troubles and the remarkable way it was dealing with them.

There's plenty to see and to read, and plenty to figure out how to work. There are also some malfunctions to fix; don't be dissuaded if you lack knowledge in electronics or chemistry; you don't need them—just logic.

Except for one of those troubles to which you've fallen heir, there's very little danger in most of *Planetfall*. The need to find a source of food and liquid is your most life-threatening problem until quite near the end.

Even then, the dangers come from mistakes, yours and those of the long-gone civilization, not from evil. You won't miss the danger. The delight of a new world and superior puzzles, and, of course, a friend like Floyd, is plenty.

Many of the puzzles are outstanding, although one good one does have the hero running up and down between floors a bit even after the puzzle is essentially solved. The gaming system is Infocom's normal one, superior and ever improving.

But it is the writing, the prose, that merits the most attention. Meretzky is an adventurer, not a seasoned writer, as a few rough spots attest. Overall, the text is rich and colorful and intelligent. As with a fine novel, it takes only the cooperation of your imagination to see every nuance of the setting in close detail and to empathize with the characters.

Perhaps it is those very rough spots that, by contrast, bring to awareness how close well-made adventures are to becoming a legitimate form of literature. While a number of people are struggling to bring literature to the computer via hybrid short stories, interactive fiction, and other new forms with varying degrees of unsucccess, the old adventure, being honed and refined and filled out, is getting there first.

Hey, Floyd, isn't this an exciting time to be alive? (T
Planetfall, by Steve Meretzky, Infocom (55 Wheeler Street, Cambridge, MA 02138; 617-492-1031). \$49.95.

Bookends: The Reference Management System. By Jonathan D. Ashwell. Perhaps Sensible Software puts out relatively few products because it spends a whole lot of time searching for near-perfect programmers. Or maybe the programmers come to Sensible—birds of a feather, and all that—and they and Sensible spend a whole lot of time making the programs perfect before they release them. Whatever, you can rely on Sensible's programs to do what they say they will and do it well and easily.

With *Bookends*, Sensible has outdone itself. Think of every gripe you've ever had about home-use programs—accounting packages, databases, and so on. Don't you wish they wouldn't take ten minutes to sort? Don't you wish they'd let you print *and* sort? If you think of a hundred more wishes, you won't have outthought Jonathan Ashwell; and he fixed them all in *Bookends*.

Bookends apologizes for the length of sorting time it takes if you should ask it to sort a seven-hundred-item file by keyword, where every item can have up to 255 characters' worth of keywords. The maximum time for which it's apologizing? Forty-five seconds. You see, most sorts in *Bookends* take no time, at least not discernibly; you wouldn't have time to press another key in the time most of its sorts take.

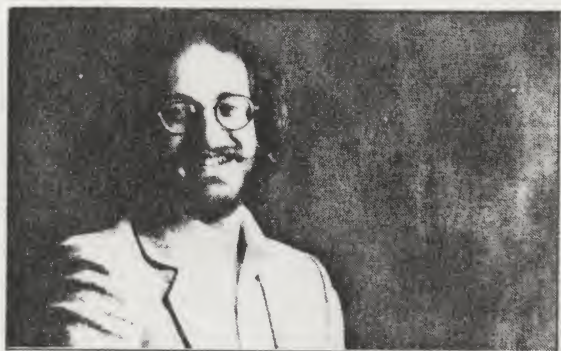
First learning to work with *Bookends* is one "But I thought that couldn't be done!" after another. For instance, cinchy editing anytime; if you're looking at it, you can edit it. Getting out of absolutely anything you've gotten yourself into without losing any data or even editing. Searching on scant knowledge—"I know that article was about Janek somebody or other, but I can't remember the rest"; if Janek was in the title, a title search will find the article, and a keyword search will do it otherwise. Printing out any fields in any order on any selection of records, arranged alphabetically instantly by author, title, keyword, or not at all. That's just a few.

There must be a catch, right? There is. *Bookends* is just for people who have a reason to want a file that indexes magazine articles or books, that confines its audience to publishers, engineers, scientists, doctors, lawyers, computer users, students, journalists—just a few esoteric groups. Of course, although Sensible doesn't say so, *Bookends* works just as well for indexing records, movies, and software. So add musicians, stereo collectors, filmmakers, movie fans, and more computer users. It's very limited.

All data goes into *Bookends* in the same form: author, title, journal, volume, pages, date, publisher, keywords, abstract, and classification. (How it comes out is a different matter. Patience.) The lengths of the fields are limited. There's the rub, you say—but only if 255 characters makes you claustrophobic; that's the limit on all but two fields. The classification, which allows you to output different kinds of items in the same list in different formats, is limited to the one character it needs. In the abstract, a description of the work cited, you're allowed 740 characters for your purple prose.

Most fields accept multiple entries. *Softalk*, for instance, has a

Electronic Antics



BY PAUL FREIBERGER
Senior Editor

Another routine day of drudgery aboard the Stellar Patrol Ship *Feinstein*. This morning's assignment for a certain lowly Ensign *Seventh Class*: scrubbing the filthy metal deck at the port end of Level 9. With your patrol-issue, self-contained, multipurpose, all-weather scrub brush, you shine the floor with a diligence born of the knowledge that at any moment, dreaded Ensign *First Class Blather*, the bane of your shipboard existence, could appear.

It's the start of *Planetfall*, the latest game that's been keeping me from my work. To the naked eye, this game has no graphics; it doesn't use a joystick; and it doesn't make your computer beep. But the absence of these trademarks of computer games doesn't detract from the glorious fun and challenge of this rather cocky game.

"Go north," I command.

You can't go that way. The alien ambassador from the planet *Blow'k-bibben-Gordo* ambles toward you from down the corridor. He is munching on something resembling an enormous stalk of celery, and he leaves a trail of green slime on the deck. He stops nearby, and you wince as a pool of slime begins forming beneath him on your newly polished deck. The ambassador wheezes loudly and hands you a brochure outlining his planet's major exports.

I attempt to go west.

The ambassador offers you a bit of celery.

Since I've already had my daily bagel, I ignore the offer and try to head south. Ensign *Blather* disapproves and sends me to the brig. Soon a massive explosion rocks the ship. Before I know it the pressure drops, and I go down with the ship.

Too bad you weren't in the escape pod.

I'm frustrated by my sudden demise until I remember that a good game — especially of this type — is challenging. You shouldn't be able to "win" until you have played for many weeks.

Besides, I see on the screen:

Oh, well. According to the Treaty of Gishen IV, signed 8747 GY, all adventure game players must be given another chance after dying. In the interests of interstellar peace, would you like to play again?

Naturally I accept the challenge. This time I manage to enter the escape pod

Thus it no more needs photos than does *Treasure Island*. The words set the scene and mentally transport you into a fictional world in a way a computer display cannot (not yet, anyway). Indeed, few of Infocom's authors possess computer training. One of them, Michael Berlyn, is an accomplished science-fiction writer (*The Integrated Man*, Bantam, 1980).

"We think of our games as interactive fiction," says Berlyn. "You design the environment, simulate it as best you can. You throw the characters into the situation and establish the goals."

The original game of this genre, called

The absence of graphics and sound in Planetfall doesn't detract from the glorious fun and challenge of this rather cocky game.

before the explosion. Before long I am told:

Approaching planet human habitable.

I'm on my way, jettisoned to an alien world that I'll explore with a newfound friend — a robot named Floyd. My task is to locate and figure out how to operate an aging helicopter.

Unfortunately I can't tell you how *Planetfall* ends. After all, if it were easy, it wouldn't be fun. And up to now I've only accumulated 30 of 80 possible points, and I haven't yet started the helicopter.

Planetfall is only one of several adventure games offered by Infocom, a company that is turning adventure games into a new art. You can buy the games for many personal computers, including the Apple IIe and the IBM Personal Computer.

Infocom's advertisements proclaim the graphics are all in your head, and the company has so far refused to add on-screen graphics to its games. I endorse the decision. I've seen graphics on adventure games, and they just can't measure up to wildly imaginative descriptions such as those in *Planetfall*.

An adventure game is as much a literary work as it is a computer game.

Adventure, was written on a mainframe computer at MIT by Will Crowther and Don Woods. You explored a maze, fought dragons and found treasure. Other games, many based on the TV show "Star Trek," were also developed on mainframes. Several years ago a software company called Adventure International popularized adventure games for personal computers.

The Infocom Adventures are impressive. In addition to the software, *Planetfall* comes with such extras as red and green official documents labeled File of the Stellar Patrol of Third Galactic Union and an identification badge. (You'll want to read the documents for clues to the game.)

While writing this column, I happened to speak to *Planetfall* author Steve Meretzky, who gave me a couple of hints that I'll pass on to you: Floyd is not there for mere entertainment. There are some things he can do that you can't. He holds the lower elevator card, for instance, which you will need at some point. Getting him to hand it over is a bit tricky, however. Be persistent.

It's also useful to play *Planetfall* with a friend. You'll solve the puzzle faster and have fun while you play this game in which the graphics are all in your mind. ●

Electronic Antics



BY SCOTT MACE
Senior Editor

If you bought a home computer in 1983, you probably found that it was a good year for game software. The year bore heavy fruit in games and entertainment, especially for the Apple and Atari home computers. Of course, you had to search for the good products — there were lots of look-alikes and just plain duds.

I'd like to look back at the best entertainment software of 1983. Here are the first-ever Electronic Antics Awards:

Best arcade-type computer game: Miner 2049er, created by Big Five Software of Van Nuys, California. You won't find anything like Miner in the arcades. That in itself is cause for celebration. It means that home-computer games are coming into their own, despite a year of endless adaptations of arcade games, some good, most bad. Where else can you operate a scissors lift, get shot out of a cannon and slide down slides, all in one game? Miner 2049er "out-donkey-kongs" Donkey Kong. For humor, action and inventiveness, it can't be beat.

Best strategy game: M.U.L.E. from Electronic Arts of San Mateo, California. It typifies a new breed of computer games that resemble the best multiplayer board games of old. M.U.L.E. has the best (and weirdest) music as well. M.U.L.E. also proves that software designed primarily for entertainment can be highly educational, too.

Best adventure game: Planetfall from Infocom of Cambridge, Massachusetts. This was a tough decision, since so many of the Infocom adventure games deserve to win, but I had to pick one. Planetfall also wins best packaging of the year award for its outrageous "dossier," which includes extraterrestrial postcards.

Best game generator: Pinball Construction Set from Electronic Arts. This

game practically invented the category. The future of video gaming probably depends on allowing users to create their own games because sooner or later the major game companies will begin to repeat themselves, in many instances. A host of other game generators are available, and I will try to examine each one. Next week, though, I'll look at Pinball Construction Set in depth.

Best music generator: Music Construction Set from Electronic Arts. You have to see it (and hear it) to believe it. This program sets a new standard for entertainment software. It was inspired by Pinball Construction Set's use of icons and a video "hand" to move objects on the screen. You can expect to see many imitators of this one, too.

Best joystick: The Prostick II from Newport Controls of Bishop, California. I've used a Prostick II for several weeks, after having tried most of the other Atari-type joysticks during the year. The Prostick beats them all for flexibility and ruggedness.

Newport's joystick has a turnable ring (a "gate plate" in video-game terminology) that lets you switch between four-position and eight-position modes. The gate plate locks out the diagonal positions and eliminates the "dead spots" I used to encounter when I used a standard eight-position joystick on a typical maze game.

I am a little ashamed, though. When I played one game with the Prostick, my high score went from 3 million points to 20 million. Obviously using the Prostick gives you an unfair advantage with some games. Software designers may have to negate that advantage in the future. But for now, Prostick is the best joystick around.

In the past few issues, I've looked at several arcade-type games: Pole Position, River Raid and Blue Max, for instance. The quality of arcade-style games went way up in 1983. Here are a few others that stand out.

Pooyan by Datasoft of Northridge, California, based on the arcade game from Konami of Japan, is as close as any home-computer game gets to an arcade original. The Pooyan are defenseless piglets who are endangered by hungry wolves. You fight to protect the Pooyan and yourself from the wolves, who cling to helium balloons. You shoot arrows at the balloons,

which then pop, slaying the wolves. All the time you are raising or lowering your basket up and down a cliff, avoiding the deadly acorns the wolves are throwing at you. Occasionally you can throw a chunk of meat and, if you aim right, the wolves let go of their balloons and perish in a futile attempt to grab the meat.

Drol from Broderbund Software of San Rafael, California, is one game exclusively created for home computers. Never have I found a game with wackier characters — bouncing snakes, a head-turning witch doctor and unattended, roving vacuum cleaners that honk as they try to mow you down. What's more, the air is often filled with flying hatchets and knives. For all its violence, Drol is a funny and engaging game.

Your lowly drone, Drol, must repel all these foes. The prizes are equally humorous — a red lizard, a little girl with a balloon and a gagged-and-bound mother! (The violence goes on.)

Arcade games tend to have similar themes. Within a month I received two games that, despite cosmetic differences, have the same kind of play action. Both Oil's Well from Sierra On-Line of Coarsegold, California, and Ardy from Datamost of Chatsworth, California, are based on what you might call the old plumber's snake device: a retractable, flexible line you shove down a hole to retrieve something.

The "something" in both games is points and prizes scattered throughout tunnels. In both games, you must protect your line from nasty gremlins. Your main defense is retracting your line, but it takes time to reel it in all the way.

If you succeed in gathering all the targets on the screen, you move to tougher screens. Both games have "superzappers" at the bottom of each screen that eliminate all the nasties on the screen at that time. First, though, you have to reach the bottom of the screen, which is the real trick.

These games do differ. In Oil's Well, you control a drill bit attached to a line; in Ardy, you have an aardvark instead of a derrick.

The maze of tunnels in Ardy is an anthill; in Oil's Well, it's an oil field. Oil's Well, at least for the Atari, is much faster than the Apple version of Ardy. Sierra On-Line has the better game.

Infocom Does It Again... And Again

Monte Schultz and Steve Arrants

With each new release, each new venture into a genre they have made famous, the people at Infocom, authors of *Zork* and *Deadline*, seem to reaffirm a commitment to a level of quality and innovation that has guaranteed them not only a fiercely loyal following, but also an undisputed position at the forefront of the computer adventure market.

Being in such a position can have its drawbacks, not the least of which is striving to maintain the level of quality and excellence for which they are known. Thus far this year, with the releases of Michael Berlyn's *Suspended* and Stu Galley's *The Witness*, they have done nothing but strengthen their position. And now there is *Planetfall*, a new science fiction adventure by another first time Infocom author, Steve Meretsky.

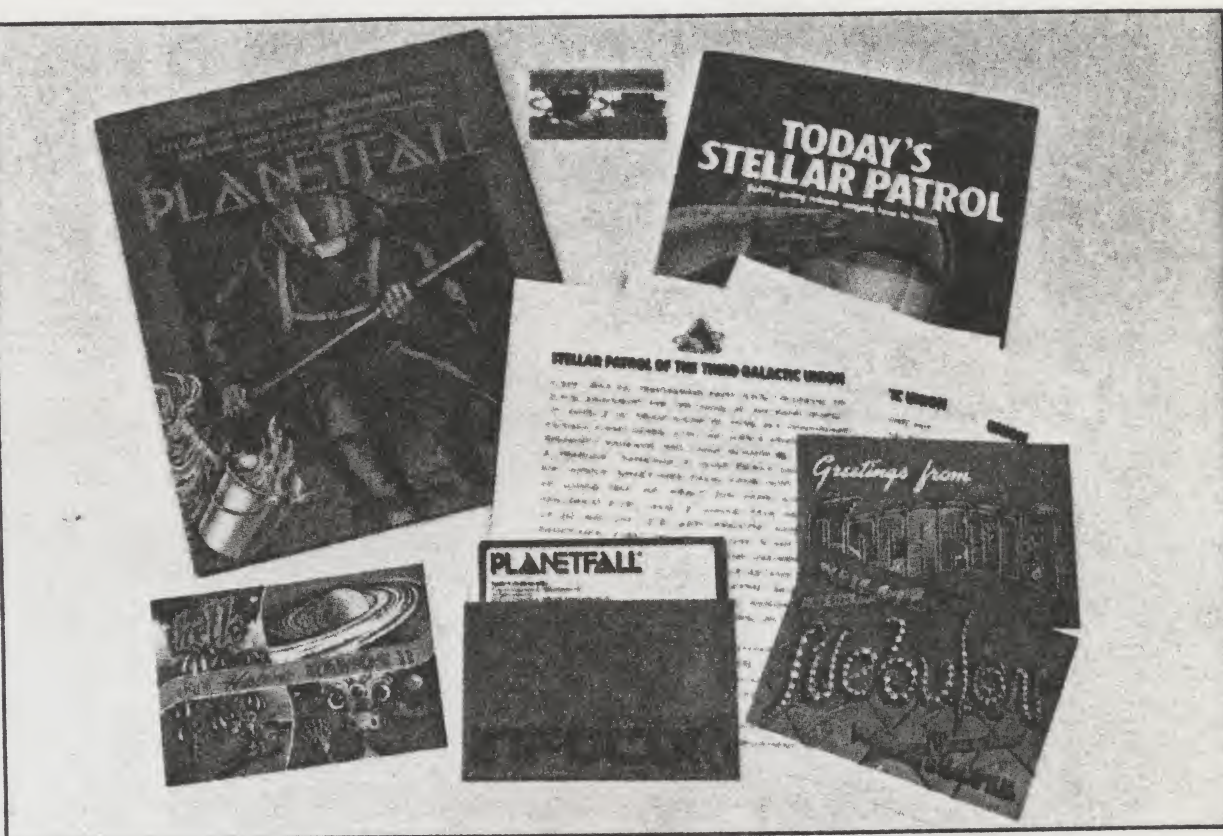
Planetfall

Planetfall is as remarkable, funny, perplexing, and entertaining a game as you are likely to find anywhere. It begins with

Like Zork, Planetfall is big—more than 100 rooms.

you, a lowly ensign seventh class, scrubbing deck nine of the Stellar Patrol Ship Feinstein. Thanks to a certain Ensign First Class Blather, this tour of duty has not been everything you had hoped it might be. However, things are about to take an unexpected turn and not necessarily for the better.

Cast alone into space, you soon find yourself marooned on one of two twin islands in the middle of the strange water-covered planet working hard just to find a little food and a safe place to sleep. As



night falls on the first day, and you prepare to bed down in a large empty dormitory, you will have wandered about and mapped most of a huge complex called Kalamontee.

When you wake again, the real adventure begins as you try to discover why the complex was apparently abandoned and what happened to those who were there before you.

In your search for answers to these and other questions, you will find a friend, a robot named Floyd, who will prove to be as good and true a companion to you as E.T. was to Elliot.

Clearly, the most imaginative and cleverly written part of the entire game, Floyd, besides being hysterically funny through most of the adventure, evokes in the player of *Planetfall* authentic feelings of affection and attachment. Indeed, Floyd is critical to finishing the game in terms of being a large part of the solution to three major problems in *Planetfall* besides lending his own brand of moral support to the stranded and baffled adventurer.

Like *Zork*, *Planetfall* is big—more than 100 rooms and much of the fun of the game is found in exploring the vast twin complexes of Kalamontee and Lawanda. In fact, each area of *Planetfall* seems to lead you on to the next, holding your

creative computing SOFTWARE PROFILE

Name: Planetfall

Type: Text adventure

System: Apple, Atari, IBM PC,
Commodore 64, TRS-80

Format: Disk

Summary: Best entry level adventure
from Infocom. Logical,
funny, entertaining.

Price: \$49.95

Manufacturer:

Infocom, Inc.
55 Wheeler St.
Cambridge, MA 02138

Infocom, continued...

attention yet never becoming so obscure as to drain your enthusiasm.

The level of difficulty is, of course, subjective; it took me 30 to 40 hours to acquire all 80 points, thanks mostly to a disastrous oversight in mapping, two red herrings, and one particularly challenging puzzle near the end of the game. Still, the solutions to the more difficult puzzles never quite seem unattainable, so the hours spent locked to the computer do not feel wasted.

The puzzles in *Planetfall* are, for the most part, of an interactive nature, meaning that objects like special access cards, keys, and other tools must be combined in a variety of ways to find solutions to the problems presented.

Fortunately, this game has probably the most logical and straightforward puzzles of any Infocom adventure, so patience and perseverance are rewarded without any unnecessary reliance on sheer luck.

In terms of danger, there are few instances in this game where the player runs the risk of happening upon the kind of gratuitous death one finds in both the *Zork* trilogy and *Starcross*. The risks one takes in *Planetfall* are ones for which he can prepare, and in most cases only carelessness evokes the standard ***You have died*** response from the program.

Text IS Fine

Planetfall is a perfect argument in favor of text adventures. The detail present in the descriptions—that which is provided for the mind to see—and those special parts of the game that produce a kind of running action, would simply appear like so many Saturday morning cartoons on a hi-res screen, effectively weakening both the excitement and the drama in those sequences. Though, again, this type of game requires more than a passive involvement from the player and indeed, will not give up many of its secrets without both an intellectual and imaginative investment from the player. For my part, as

If you do find a likely suspect, it is possible that a jury will release him because your evidence is not compelling.

in reading a good book, this is as it should be.

The documentation for *Planetfall* includes, among other things, a manual and a very funny diary. The manual especially is well worth reading since the people at Infocom tell me that the majority of problems stranded adventurers ask for hints

on can be avoided by a careful examination of the command and advice instructions. (I say this from experience having spent at least a month longer than I should have in the Riddle Room of *Zork II* through a failure to read carefully the instructions for speaking to other characters in the game.)

To my mind, *Planetfall*, is the most entertaining Infocom program yet, particularly on the first time through. It has a liveliness to it that never seems to falter, and the ending is without a doubt the most satisfying yet.

First time author Steve Meretsky has written a game that is most of all fun to play, which is really what these games are all about. As an entry level game for

recently committed suicide, and her ex-lover has threatened to kill Linder. While you are in the mansion, Linder is killed. The ex-lover is seen running through the woods behind the house. Did he commit the murder? Is the case closed? Monica, Linder's daughter and the Oriental butler seem to be involved in the case. Where? How? What secrets are they hiding?

As the red herrings begin to pile up, you race against the clock to solve this difficult case. You can question the suspects, but if you are too aggressive or too fawning, you will not get far. Suspects can also lie, whether they are guilty or innocent. You must discover the truth about Linder, his wife, her lover, and the murderer.



those who have yet to try one of Infocom's adventures, *Planetfall* deserves a large audience. —MS

The Witness

Many Infocom games include maps, clues, and other devices that help you in the game. *Witness* includes a telegram, a suicide note, a pack of matches, a newspaper front page, and an issue of *National Detective* magazine which contains hints for playing the game.

Witness is a murder mystery that takes place in 1938. An interesting twist on this theme is that the murder takes place while you are talking to the victim! You can't prevent the murder—that would make for a short game. You must discover who the murderer is and gather enough evidence for a conviction. It isn't enough to have some evidence and a strong hunch. You must prove beyond a reasonable doubt that the accused committed a murder.

The game begins as you are called to the mansion of a Mr. Linder. His wife

You have an assistant who performs laboratory analysis on fingerprints and other evidence. If you find yourself in a tough spot, he will even help save your life.

If you do find a likely suspect, it is

creative computing SOFTWARE PROFILE

Name: The Witness

Type: Mystery

System: Apple II+, IIe

Format: Disk

Language: Machine

Summary: Tough, involving, and a winner.

Price: \$49.95

Manufacturer:

Infocom, Inc.

55 Wheeler St.

Cambridge, MA 02138

Infocom, continued...

possible that a jury will release him because your evidence is not compelling. Make sure that you have an iron-clad case or a murderer may be set free.

Infocom has come up with another fine game with *Witness*. They really have no competition. No other text adventure game has such a sophisticated parser. Most only allow the input of simple commands. Infocom's innovative parser lets you link commands in one sentence, making the game seem more natural and life-like.

Their packaging of games is also innovative. Whether it is *Witness*, *Deadline*, *Suspended*, or *Starcross*, the package of each game is related to the action. *Witness* has clues in a police file. *Suspended* has a map of the underground complex in which it takes place and markers for the robots, in addition to memos from the director of the complex.

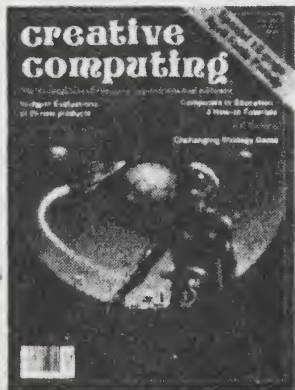
Getting you into the right frame of mind is as important as the playability of a game. Infocom is rare in that it believes this philosophy.

Witness is not for a beginner at text games. I solved the mystery through luck rather than hard detective work. It may take you quite a long time to solve this case. If you have ever longed to work with Philip Marlowe, Miss Marple, or Lord Peter Wimsey, *Witness* is the next best thing.—SA

END

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by Dr. J.C. Gilland
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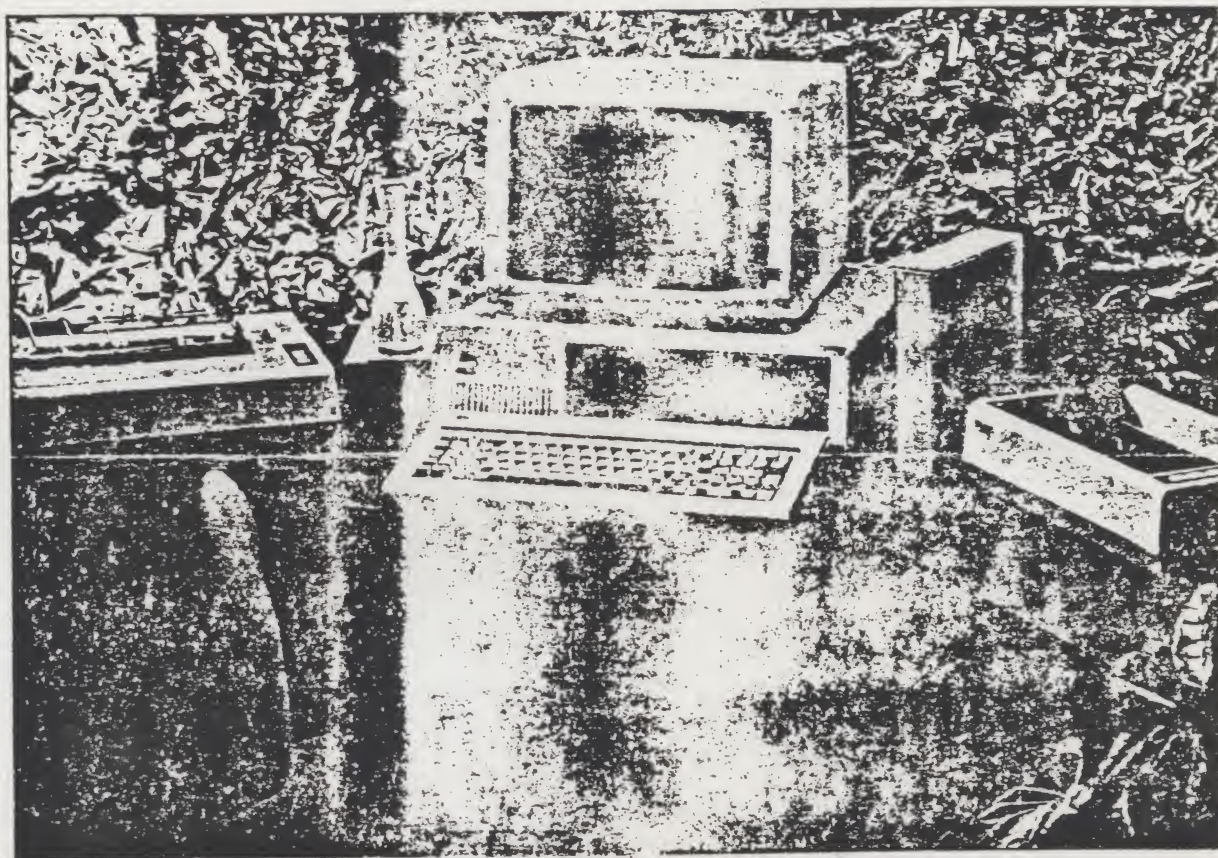


Computers

By David Dawson

GET WITH THE PROGRAM!

*A Layman's Guide To The
Computer Revolution.*



LET'S GET THE METAPHYSICS OUT of the way right off the bat.

On one hand there are those who state that the Computer Revolution we've been hearing so much about these past years is just beginning. Computers—the stand-alone, home variety—are to be regarded as The Wave Of The Future, we are told, the personal arm of the technological revolution. Adherents to this view generally look upon those who do not own home computers as primeval nerds who have miserable complexions, lips which are continually cracked, and hair which falls out in copious chunks.

Then you have those who proclaim

that the Computer Revolution was a massive bust. They point to Texas Instruments' multi-million dollar flop as *prima facie* evidence. To these folks, home computers are nothing more than frivolous gadgets, the black-light posters of the Eighties. To hear them tell it, computers are dangerous threats to our way of life, and anyone who spends hours every day hunched over a glowing monitor must be a primeval nerd whose complexion is miserable, whose lips are continually cracked, and whose hair falls out in copious chunks.

Mine is not to address such weighty questions as these; I'm perfectly willing

to leave such speculations to the mystics in Silicon Valley. The fact is that there is truth in both schools of thought. People who don't own computers are probably missing out on something valuable, while people who swear they are the greatest thing to happen to mankind since Eve bit the apple (the fruity kind, of course) also are perhaps a bit skewed.

But there's one more fact we need to consider. Lots of people, whatever mental baggage they bring to the computer store with them, actually *have* bought home computers. Some use them a lot; some barely at all.

PHOTOGRAPHED BY DAN WIREMAN AT COMPUTER

What, then, is my point? Well, partly it's to introduce a kind of journalistic experiment, and partly it's to scare away any readers who may be merely window shopping. Let me serve two warnings right up front: first, I am not an expert—never was, never want to be—when it comes to computers. My aim in writing a software review column is only to play with a few truly worthwhile programs each month, and pass along the good word to those of you who might be interested. Or, if I run into a good book, a virtuous bulletin board system, database, or piece of hardware, I'll perhaps review it as well. I bring to this experience the innocence vital to any good critic. You don't have to be able to hit a Dwight Gooden fastball to realize that he's a hell of a pitcher. My vantage point is that of the Average Computer User: what buffaloes me is likely what will buffalo everyone else.

Now my second warning: if you don't happen to give a hoot about computers, read no further. You'll only find yourself even more diffident when you are done. For it's not my job here to sell the prospective computer owner on his choice, saying IBM will do this for you, Apple will do this, Commodore this, and so on. If you're looking for a computer pep rally here, do yourself a favor: turn to the fashion ads, and get out while there's still a smile on your face.

There, I narrowed it down. This column is for those who, like myself, have made the plunge into computerdom based as much as anything else on the blind faith that there is virtue in the machines. What that virtue is depends in large measure on what you ask of them. If you use a computer to keep track of your recipes and phone numbers, you're likely to be disappointed. However, if you use it to write that novel you've always known to lurk somewhere in your brain, you'll likely be raving about computers.

There is, however, a middle ground here, one which I will attempt to tread. With literally tens of thousands of programs written for Apples and IBM's—the two which are coming to be recognized as the industry standards—my point is that there must be a worthy few, somewhere, that will actually make the purchase of a computer seem like a good bet. "They're all good machines," my attendant computer expert continues to inform me. "What you buy them for is the software."

So, in the coming months, I'll be reviewing software that seems to me to have enough intrinsic value to warrant the purchase of a computer. I'll bring to this column the knowledge of an educated layman—I've been good at learn-

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ing a variety of programs in the past, and hope to bring this knack (perhaps it is nothing more than an abundance of patience) to bear on the task at hand. Therefore, you have no need to fear technical language (the great turn-off for most lay computer users), arcane applications (I promise never to review programs designed to help you run a pumpkin farm), or tips on programming (no advice here on what to do with stray GOTO's or POKE's.) For technical information, all I can do is advise you to find the nearest 13-year old—they know a lot more about that sort of thing than I can claim.

All right, all right, I hear you. Enough introduction, already. Let's get down to it.

ON ACCOUNT OF MY RATHER lengthy introduction, it may be best to go with something short and simple this month. Let's start with a game. After all, computers *ought* to be fun too, right?

**The fact that someone
can invent a game as
intriguing as
Planetfall is proof
that computers can be
more than expensive
paperweights.**

Planetfall, a game put out by Infocom (makers of the dreaded Zork series), is just about worth the purchase of a computer. No fooling. The reason: you know that if someone can come up with something as intriguing and beguiling as *Planetfall*, then computers really are more than expensive paperweights. *Planetfall*'s now new, but it has the intrinsic merit I feel will make it a classic.

The only thing *Planetfall* does is propel you from whatever droll concerns happen to be nagging you, and transport you to your very own abandoned planet. No fancy graphics here—the only "pictures" associated with *Planetfall* are the ones you conjure in your own mind. And conjure you will, for *Planetfall* is more like a good novel than anything we usually associate with computers. To "move" or "act," you simply respond to the description on the monitor by typing in the appropriate commands. "Walk north," you might say, and after a bit of whirring from the disk drive, north you will go. Encounter a wrench and a shoebox in one of the "rooms," and type

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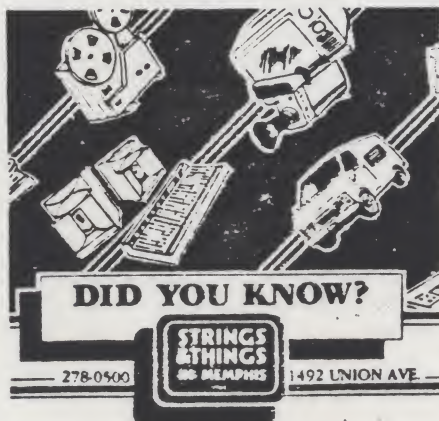
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in the necessary commands. "Take the wrench and break the shoebox," you might type. If that doesn't work, you might resort to "Eat the wrench and burp into the shoebox." Don't laugh—in any of Infocom's all-text adventure games, the absurd is often the best course.

Be forewarned: Planetfall is addictive. You find yourself dreaming at night of ways to get, say, from the Planetary Defense Room to the Radiation Lock West without being assailed by strange mutants or rampaging microbes.

Not bad for a meager floppy disk.

The game begins with you—an Ensign 7th Class aboard Stellar Patrol Ship Feinstein in the year 11,344—swabbing the decks of some vile, slimy substance left in the wake of a celery-eating ambassador from a strange land. Your commander, Ensign 1st Class Blather, is a real jerk, the kind of man who will give you demerits if he finds the least bit of mess on the floor. Naturally, you are scrubbing for all it's worth, hoping that Blather doesn't wander through.

Suddenly, the sound of an explosion rocks the ship. Bulkhead doors begin slamming shut. You find a way to get into a nearby escape pod, and are transported to a planet which looks to be recently abandoned. Great, you say. No food, no water, no company. Your adventure has just begun.

In the course of your search around this strange planet—which you determine to be composed of two large islands—you will find a robot named Floyd. Activate him, and he will help you explore and unravel the mysteries of this strange new world you seem to be stuck on. Floyd has a knack for humor—such as humming the death scene from "Carmen" at inappropriate moments—but other than that he is an excellent companion.

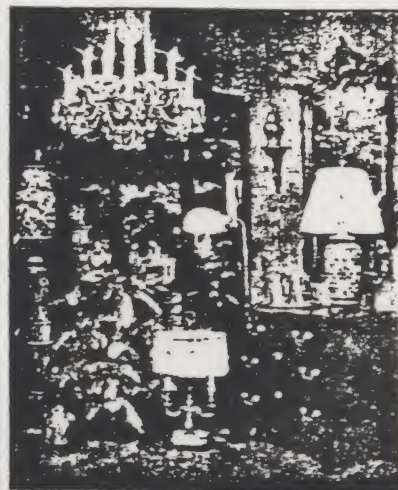
To tell more would be like divulging the murderer in an Agatha Christie book. Suffice to say that there are several possible endings to Planetfall, and that diligence will pay off.

Why do I like it? Several reasons. First and foremost, it is the only Infocom game I've become obsessed with—and I've covered a bunch—that it's actually possible to make progress in. Sure, you can get around Zork (a dungeons and dragons adventure) or Deadline (a murder mystery), and score some points here and there. But generally everyone becomes stuck. Like Rubik's Cube, frustration eventually sets in, and the games get shuffled off to a dark corner of the disk storage box.

Not so with Planetfall. Progress depends largely on persistence—keep af-

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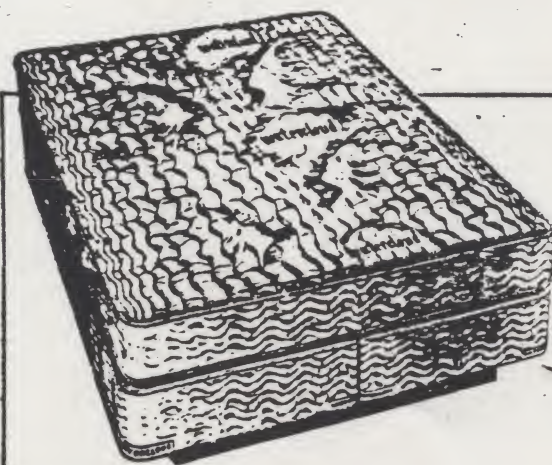
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ter something, and you will prevail. Logic is the order of the day on this strange planet. This is not to say that there aren't plenty of bizarre situations and red herrings. It means simply that the game is solvable. It took me about three months, but I succeeded with Planetfall where I had failed with all of the other Infocom games I had tried. Planetfall is so straightforward that you can even make a good map of your "world" and not worry about passages disappearing or wizards soaring through to steal your lunch and move the walls.

The second reason I'm so enamored of Planetfall is that it has a sense of humor which keeps the game fresh even during the most frustrating moments. Floyd's antics are amusing at first, but tend to get a bit tiresome after he's performed them four hundred times. But what's humorous has to do with the game itself. In your orientation packet you are given several postcards—"Wriggle On Over To Nebulon, Home

Planetfall requires persistence—keep after something, and you will eventually prevail. Logic is the order of the day on this strange planet.

of the Worm People," one says, while another reads, "Greetings From Accardi-3," a place where you can witness "the exotic anatomical charms of the Gabrillic Hyphenated Woman." All through the game, humor abounds, even in the solutions to many of the problems. I know it sounds a bit perverse to laugh at a computer screen in the middle of the night, but so be it.

As for complaints, the only one I have is that I no longer have Planetfall to mess around with in my spare time. Despite this, I found that even the ending to the game was a joy, and my sense of fulfillment at having solved Planetfall's seemingly endless mysteries made up immediately for all the frustration I felt lost in one of Zork's caverns.

Planetfall is available for Apple II, 48K, IBM, etc. It requires 64K memory, one disk drive, and a fair amount of patience and tact.

The first thing you notice about an Infocom game is its packaging. Quite simply, Infocom produces the most imaginative packages on the market. Remember the **Suspended** package, with the skull-mask eyes that stare at you from counter tops? Or **Deadline**'s detective case file?

Enchanter, the first game in a new fantasy series from Infocom, features a blue package with a jagged crack running across it. Open the package, and you find a parchment with a wax-embossed seal, a well-written and clever game booklet and the game disk itself.

An authentic-looking parchment with a wax seal? Yes, computer games have come a long way from the days when you got a mimeographed instruction sheet and a disk in a baggie. And we find it a lot easier to pay a high price for this sort of class act. The people at Infocom are trying hard to make you feel like part of the story, and packaging is an important part of this effort.

Upon reading the booklet and opening the sealed parchment, you discover that Belboz, chief of the Circle of Enchanters, has discovered that a new and powerful force for evil in the world is gaining power daily. Belboz also knows that the Ancients had foreseen this danger. According to a prophecy from some very old scrolls, the Ancients had divined that when this evil fell upon the land, "turning day into night," a new and inexperienced Enchanter should be the one to confront it. The Ancients felt that the evil force would disregard an inexperienced Enchanter, whereas a full member of the Circle of Enchanters would be challenged immediately.

Armed with four magic spells and a spell book, your task in **Enchanter** is to find and defeat the evil and powerful Krill. You journey past the Lonely Mountain (shades of Tolkien!) to Krill's castle, where you're in for all sorts of adventure.

This game differs from the **Zork** games in its lack of emphasis on the physical manipulation of objects (locating a key, for example) and its new emphasis on magical manipulation. Let's say that you arrive at a gate which is rusted shut. In **Zork**, you'd probably need to find some oil, lubricate the gate, and then push it open. In **Enchanter**, on

the other hand, you need to cast the right spell to open the gate. To complete your task, you must discover enough spells to make your way past the various obstacles that block your path to Krill.

In some ways, there is a similarity between finding objects with which to manipulate your environment and casting spells, but we find the concept of casting spells far more romantic and exciting. Ah, if only we could discover a spell to repair the leaking gaskets on our Camaro.

JUST FRUSTRATING ENOUGH

We don't want to give away any of the solutions to the puzzles in this adventure; you'll have a great time figuring them out for yourself. We're growing much more comfortable with the Infocom games, and this one in particular, because they contain fewer of the "dead-end" puzzles that were found in the **Zork** series. Too many times in the earlier games, you'd come up against a puzzle that was unsolvable and that prevented you from advancing to the rest of the game. But in **Enchanter**, all sorts of subtle built-in aids help keep the game flowing smoothly. Indeed, we experienced just the right amount of frustration, if there is such a thing, until the end of the game. Earlier adventures tended to frustrate us needlessly.

Lebling and Blanc, who wrote the original mainframe and micro **Zork** games, also wrote **Enchanter**. Over time, they've mellowed a bit, veering away from puzzles with inconsistent environments that only a masochist could love (such as the Royal Puzzle in **Zork III**), and evolving a far smoother, and more sophisticated, style in which everything "hangs together." Since this is the key element that makes us like **Enchanter** so much, we'll try to explain further.

LOST IN THE STORY

When you're reading an engrossing novel, the worst thing that can happen is for the author to intrude and forcibly remind you that you're simply reading a book. The magic mood of the story is disrupted. This kind of intrusion happened frequently in the **Zork** series—for example, we recall an instance in which a flood-control dam shows up in the midst of an underground environ-

ment. Lebling and Blanc are both MIT graduates, so we can understand their tendency to emphasize the technology, but this sometimes gets in the way of the story. In the **Zork** games, the authors never let you forget that you're in the middle of a computer adventure written by computer programmers.

ENCHANTER IS DIFFERENT

But **Enchanter** is different. For the first time, we got the impression that the entire background story was laid out, the castle floorplan designed, the history of the Circle of Enchanters written, and other groundwork completed before a single line of code was created. This is the only way to write a good, consistent fictional story (note, for example, the work that Tolkien did with the linguistic backgrounds of the Elves and Dwarves in *Lord of the Rings*). This is part of the process of creating a worthwhile story, and Infocom is doing it now.

Enchanter feels like a story, not a collection of puzzles loosely strung together. Perhaps this is due to the influence of the professional writers, such as Michael Berlyn, on Infocom's staff. Perhaps Blanc and Lebling are growing as writers and moving away from a programmer's view of adventure games. Finally, it may be that Infocom's programming tools are improving: This program handles much more varied input than the **Zork** programs and doesn't crash as easily. Infocom seems to be starting to think of its creations as interactive stories, rather than simply as computer programs.

We'd like to finish our discussion of **Enchanter** with a few notes for **Zork** fans. First of all, do you remember the room in **Zork III** in which a scene from **Zork IV** can be viewed? Well, that scene—a blood sacrifice ritual—is included in **Enchanter**; thus, **Enchanter** could be called **Zork IV**. Secondly, a sequel to **Enchanter**, called "Sorcerer," is due out about the time you read this review. Finally, according to an "unnamed source" at Infocom, a third game, also in the works at this time, will turn the series into a trilogy!

THE REALM OF THE PYRAMIDS

Michael Berlyn wrote several adventure

EMBARK

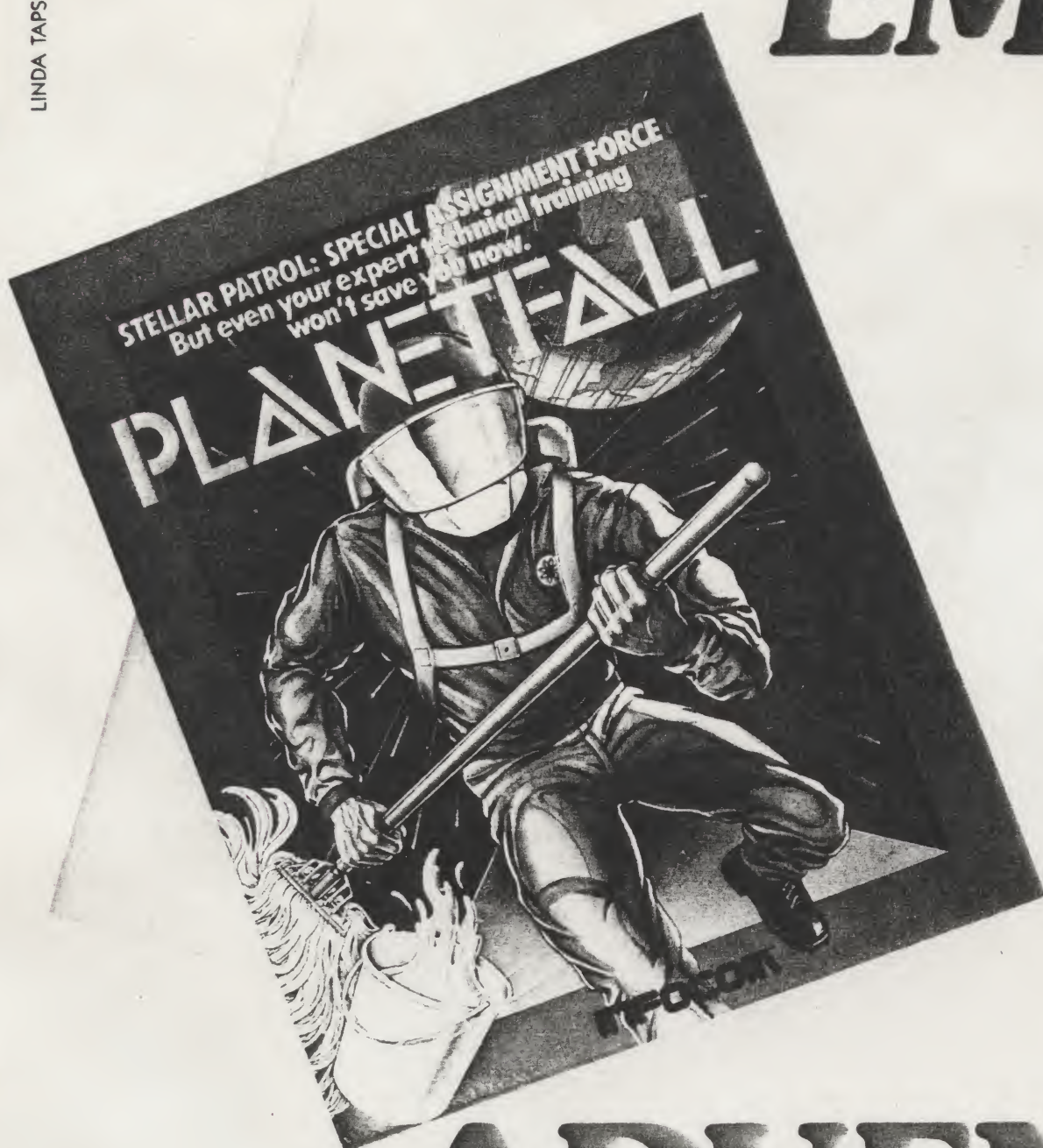
ON

THE

ROAD

TO

ADVENTURE



A look at three games from Infocom

by DAVID and SANDY SMALL

games before he joined Infocom; if you've seen **OO-Topos** or **Cyborg**, you're familiar with his earlier work. He's also published several books, so he's got credentials as both programmer and writer.

Infidel reveals the many sides of Berlyn. While it doesn't appeal as much to our deeper instincts as *Enchanter* does, it is still a good, well written game. In *Infidel*, you're a brash, young archaeologist. Tired of being an understudy to another explorer, you've decided to set out on your own. Alas, you don't know much about keeping your workers happy; when you demand that they work at the digs on a religious holiday, they drug your wine and leave you to

die in the sun, as befits an infidel.

The game includes a great deal of historical information about the find you're exploring, along with details such as the letter you were writing when you passed out from the drugged wine, a map, several archaeological symbols, and a mysterious sketch of a cube remnant. Aside from these clues, though, you are on your own.

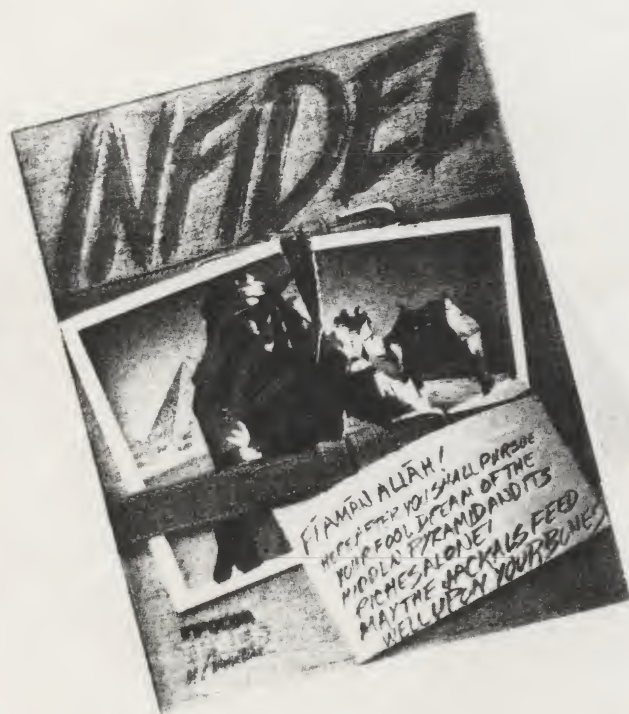
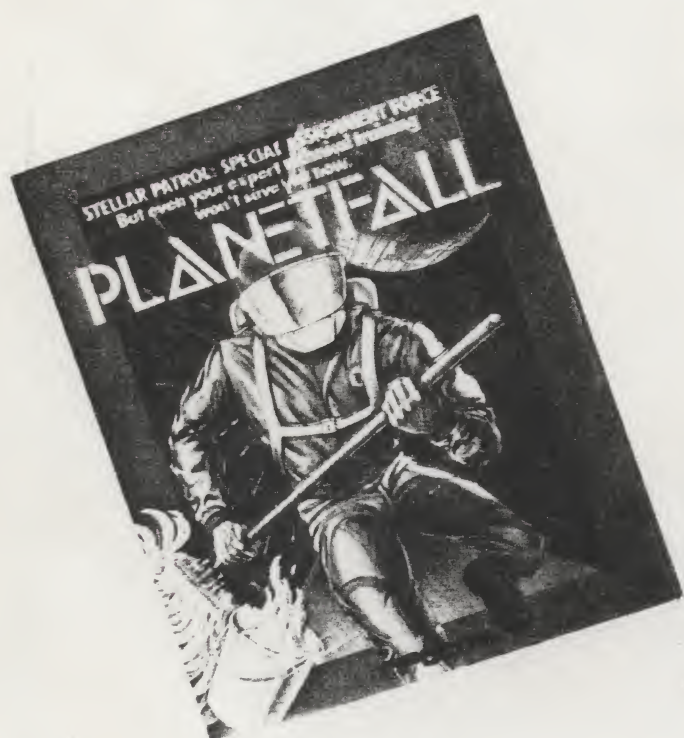
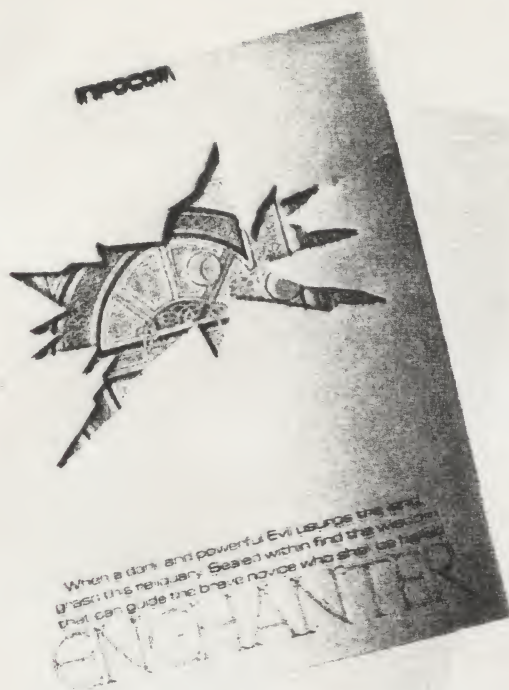
ANCIENT PUZZLES

Infidel confronts you with a number of puzzles. You can solve most of them by manipulating objects in your environment and being observant. The program doesn't try to hide information from you (for instance, if there are six exits

from a room, it tells you about all six), but it doesn't go out of its way to help you, either. Midway through the game you'll come across a puzzle that is a bit of a stickler. It will force you to experiment. One hint: If you don't get the bricks right the first time, they'll never work properly again, so you might as well **RESTORE** the game and try again. This will save you a great deal of time.

As you advance through the adventure, watch for traps and puzzles that are consistent with the technology and culture of the Age of the Pyramids—collapsing walls, deadly darts, one-way doors, bottomless pits, and the like (to avoid ruining the game for you, we've

continued on next page



mentioned some traps that aren't actually included in Infidel). If you enjoyed the movie "Raiders of the Lost Ark," you know how to approach this game.

Suspense is very important in Infidel. In one room, for example, there are four exits. Each exit leads into a corridor with a door on the far end. As you walk down the corridor, the door in front of you gradually closes; by the time you reach the door, it is completely shut. Ah, but when you look over your shoulder at the opposite corner of the room, the opposite door is open—until, of course, you walk down *that* corridor.

A NEW KIND OF INVOLVEMENT

When you finish this game, you'll realize that you've been involved in a story that was written by an author who considers it as such. You are not borne off into the sunset on the backs of cheering elves, as in earlier adventure games. Nor do you become the heir to a kingdom, save the human race, or heal the Dark Crystal. Instead, the ending is entirely consistent with the story and its background. It feels right, even if it's not what you're used to in adventure games.

PLANETFALL: A COMEDY ADVENTURE

Planetfall comes in an impressive package that pictures a go-getting soldier against a background of stars. But this interstellar soldier is carrying a mop and bucket: He's been assigned to galactic k.p.!

You've joined the Stellar Patrol to escape the drudgery of farm life. Your primary goal: to avoid the task of cleaning up after all those farm animals. So, you join the Patrol—only to find yourself assigned to clean up the spaceship *Feinstein*.

Soon, however, an asteroid destroys your ship. As the sole survivor, you manage to land on a nearby planet, which just happens to be inhabited by a robot named Floyd.

Floyd is a bit like an insecure, highly affectionate dog, or perhaps a six-year-old child. He's constantly stumbling into you, knocking things out of your grasp, challenging you to games of "Hider and Seeker," and so on.

Together with Floyd (he won't let you leave him behind), you set off to explore

the planet's buildings and corridors, and uncover a mystery about its former inhabitants. There's a lot of ground to cover, so get out a large sheet of paper and start mapping. You'll need the map by the time you're done.


We have mixed feelings about *Planetfall*. We got the distinct impression that Steve Meretsky, the author, either got tired of tying up loose ends or simply found that the fine game he'd designed didn't fit on a double-sided Atari disk, and had to be cut until it did. As a result, the game includes teleporter booths that lead nowhere, and a helicopter complete with instructions but with a control panel that can't be used.

We could be wrong, but it's always been Infocom's style to include just enough objects to complete a game, and there is an excess of material here. It's possible that Infocom has finally realized that there *should* be some excess material included in an adventure, so that you don't always know which objects need to be used. However, in this case, it doesn't appear that the excess was planned.

Planetfall does include a little gem of writing that saves it from mediocrity, and the game is worth playing just to find it. Other magazines have splashed this magic moment across their covers, thus ruining the game for their readers, but we feel that you should experience it for yourself. We gained a lot of respect for the game's author as a result of this special moment. We're pretty sure that you will too.

Infocom lists *Planetfall* as its first "Comedy Adventure." To be sure, there's a lot of humor in the game—you're tormented by an awful ensign named *Blather*—and many of the game's descriptions and responses are wonderful. However, as the author's first effort for Infocom, it is somewhat unsteady, although, clearly, a lot of thinking and work went into it.

Infocom continually produces the best-selling text adventure games. They can be contacted at: 55 Wheeler St., Cambridge, MA 02138. Telephone (617) 492-1031.

David and Sandy Small are contributing editors to Antic. They also have an abiding love of adventure games. 

Video

Role playing via computer

"Every time I get to this spot," a man on a rush-hour bus in Manhattan was overheard to exclaim recently, "this guy sees I'm with this other guy, so he grabs me and throws me off a cliff. Problem is, I have to talk to him, but he keeps throwing me off the cliff and I die." The man looked healthy enough. Did he just have a vivid imagination? Was he recounting the plot of a new thriller? Was he the victim of some kind of psychosis?

The answers are yes, yes and yes. The passenger was engrossed in an increasingly popular genre of imaginative, addictive computer entertainment known as interactive fiction.

Embracing elements of fantasy, mystery and science fiction, these role-playing games offer armchair heroes the chance to engage in derring-do across the microchips. The computer operator becomes the main character in a story, wearing the helm of an adventurer, the deerstalker cap of a sleuth or the space helmet of an interplanetary traveler. As the player navigates the twists and turns of a bewildering plot, the itchy trigger finger that wins shoot-'em-up video games doesn't help. What a player needs is a cartographer's feel for direction, a puzzler's wits, lots of patience and occasionally even a slightly warped sense of humor.

Role-playing games don't have a lot of whiz-bang graphics. They consist primarily of prose text, which appears as if a scroll were unrolling across the monitor screen. The player communicates with the game by typing plain English into the keyboard. Typically, the computer gives a description of the character's immediate surroundings, then asks the player what to do next. If you're standing at a fork in a road, you may want to type "GO NORTHEAST" to take the right fork. If you're told you are in a room full of interesting objects, you may want to ask about them, and take any useful or valuable items with you. In some games you can chat with characters you meet, unless they're monsters out to feast on you. Curiosity is indispensable, but it can also doom you. Never mind: A benevolent god reigns over the interactive universe; if you die, you can always start the game over.

The premiere publisher of interactive fiction is Infocom, based in Cambridge, Mass. Founded by a group of MIT computer scientists in 1979, Infocom built its reputation on the success of its pioneering *Zork* game, a Dungeons and Dragons type adventure. In *Zork* (\$39.95), you play the part of a free-booter questing through the Great Underground Empire, a labyrinthine dungeon concealing treasure, traps and trolls, among other surprises. *Zork I* and its sequels, *Zork II* and *III*, have ridden high on the software best-seller lists since they appeared.

In *Enchanter* (\$39.95), the player is an apprentice sorcerer, dispatched to do battle with the Evil Warlock. Trying to find a path through the bad guy's dark stronghold, the player ferrets out hidden magic spells, writing them in a book for use at the right time. Getting to the final confrontation requires much trial and error, including, more likely than not, a few fatal mistakes. But since anything is possible with computer magic, the story need not end until triumph is achieved.

Although a few sessions with an Infocom game soon teach you some standard tricks (your sword

glows when you're near danger in *Zork*, for instance), each game offers its own particular characteristics. As the lowly Ensign 7th Class aboard the doomed starship *Feinstein* in *Planetfall* (\$39.95), the player harrowingly escapes the exploding vessel to land on a decaying planet with a lost high-tech civilization. You divine that your mission may be to save the planet. But to do that you'll need the assistance of Floyd, a small robot who's not easy to find. Meanwhile, you may get eaten by a grue. What's a grue? Wouldn't you like to know, but the game isn't telling until it's much too late.

With their already puzzling plots, murder mysteries also provide an ideal frame for interactive fiction. Instead of trying to second-guess Agatha Christie, however, the player gets to be the gumshoe. Infocom's first two forays into this territory, *Deadline* (\$49.95) and *The Witness* (\$39.95), were big hits, and the company just added *Suspect* to the series. Besides the floppy disks holding the programs, these games come with a collection of props—newspaper clippings, police files—to get you started. In *Suspect*, the player is a journalist who has received an invitation to the annual Halloween party thrown by Veronica Ashcroft at her rambling Maryland estate. You mingle with the guests, asking indiscreet questions. ("Michael, tell me about Mr. Ostmann," you ask. "Ostmann would love to buy the farm but we turned him down," the game answers.) Then one of the other guests is found murdered—and you're the prime suspect. Working against time, the player has to gather

clues to prove the identity of the real murderer. Meanwhile, the other characters seem to have wills of their own, and may try to foil the investigation.

The programming behind Infocom products has become steadily more sophisticated, lending a bemusing quality to the game's responses. They can surprise frustrated players with hilarious retorts to expletives typed into the keyboard. (In *Planetfall*, if you tell the computer "Go to Hell," it replies, "Such language from an enzyme in the stellar patrol!") The "parsers," as the parts of the program that interpret the player's typed-in commands are known, nevertheless have their limits. Their vocabularies, though surprisingly large, aren't boundless, and they rely on a simple declaratory syntax. In other words, the games won't understand everything you try to tell them. If you're a neophyte, you may not understand everything the games try to tell you, either. (Infocom publishes a series of pamphlets full of hints for those who get stuck.)

Whether interactive fiction will one day achieve literary subculture status remains to be seen. The programs' prose has a utilitarian quality, though Infocom recently enlisted British author Douglas Adams to convert his sci-fi spoof, *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy* (\$39.95), into interactive form.

In any case, there's a refreshing side to interactive fiction: It lets you use your imagination, instead of your reflexes, and stimulates you to build pictures in your mind, instead of leaving them in flat dimensions on the screen. (Infocom programs are available for most home computers.)—Monty Brower

Interactive fiction programs allow even the least gallant of us to slay the occasional dragon.



ILLUSTRATION BY MICHAEL RAMUS

You'll probably think I'm a little strange, but I really identify with the characters in computer games. When *Pac-Man* arrived, I gained 20 pounds. After playing *Donkey Kong* a while, I grew a moustache, wore suspenders, and hung out at the zoo. Don't get me wrong. I'm not just weird. Fact is, I score a lot higher when I believe it's *me*—and not just some two-dimensional pixel pattern on the screen—fleeing the falling rocks, death rays, fanged beasts, and other computer-game dangers.

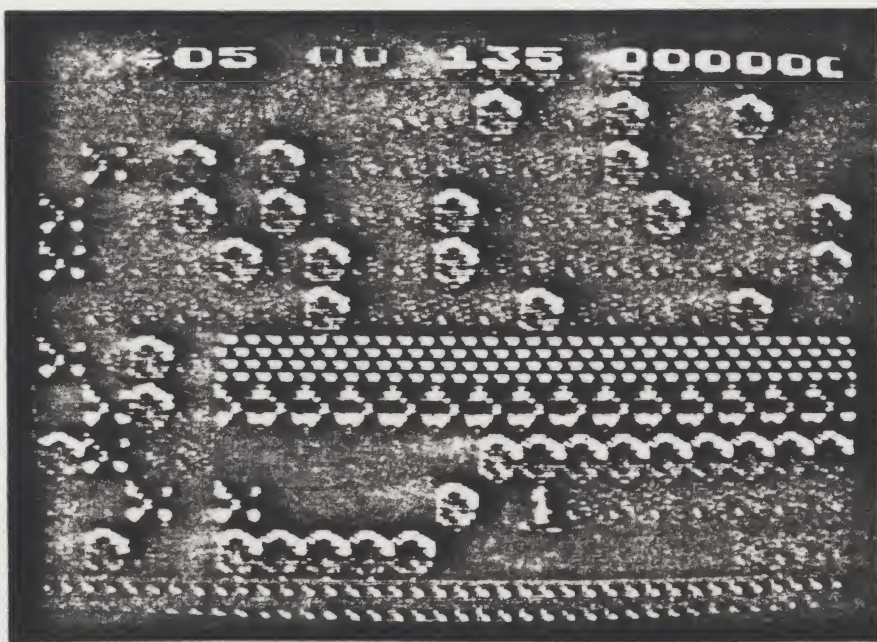
Computer games have come a long way since those classics. Now my imagination doesn't have to work so hard. Graphics and sound effects have become more complex. So have the characters. Like a good movie, a computer game with outstanding characters gets you personally involved.

CELEBRITY STATUS

Some characters are so real you could swear they have lives of their own. Some even develop cult followings and show up on all sorts of buttons and T-shirts. Pac-Man, of course, was the first popular computer game personality. At first, he was only a simple yellow shape with a huge appetite. But people wanted more, so he was given a personality in his very own cartoon series. Next came a cereal named after him, and even (so I'm told) a home in Beverly Hills!

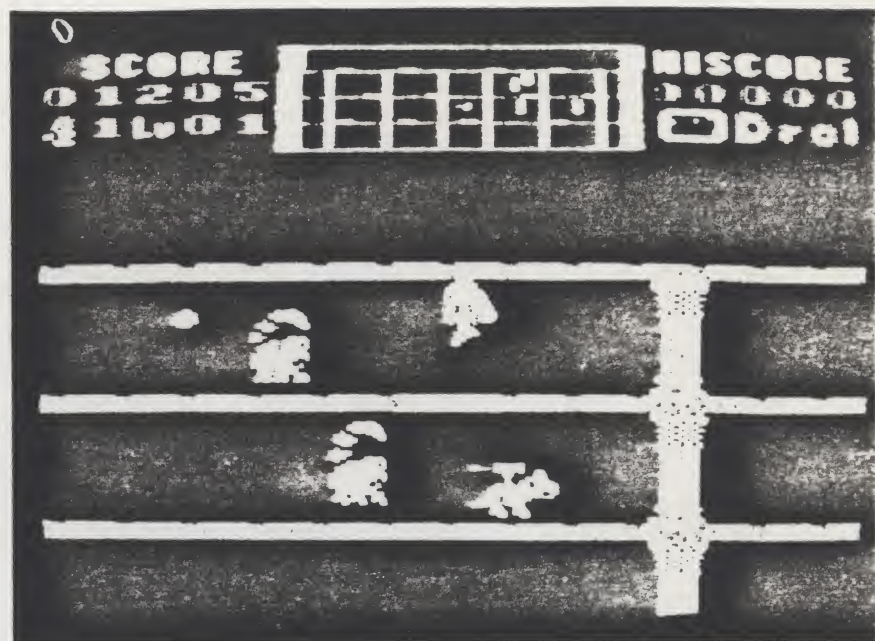
The folks behind computer games soon realized what a good character could do for a game. Take Q*bert. He could have been a boring geometric shape and the game would have been just as challenging. Instead, someone decided he should have two big feet, look cute like a koala bear, and swear when something runs into him. It may not be much, but it's enough to give the game a whole added dimension—Q*bert comes alive.

It's even fun to imagine what Q*bert does when



Boulder Dash

Computer-Generated Art: Lauretta Jones



Drol

he's not flying around on pizzas or being chased by nasty coiled snakes. Does he live in a cave? Does he have a family? Maybe there's even a tribe of Q*berts living in the jungles of Guatemala, climbing Mayan pyramids!

HEROES AND VILLAINS

A lot of people are raving about a game called *Boulder Dash*. It's got hot arcade-quality graphics, great sound effects, a lot of action and (best of all!) Rockford. Rockford's a funny-looking little bug who's crazy about jewels. He tears through all sorts of trouble to get them. You can't help but get a kick out of him. Besides, who could fail to identify with a little guy who races through dirt, dodging falling boulders and killer insects as if he were late for class? He's even restless. Delay moving your joystick too long and he blinks his eyes and taps his foot impatiently.

Some game characters are true heroes. Take the astronaut in the arcadestyle game *Drol*, for instance. With the help of a jetpack, he flies through a maze trying to rescue a family from the clutches of an evil Witch Doctor and his henchmen. What a guy! The family he's trying to save completely ignores him and even bungles his rescue attempts. Still he searches on, firing away at the hideous assortment of deadly creatures that roam the hallways in front of him. They don't make heroes like *that* anymore.

Then there are the bad guys. The "Zerks" in *Spare Change* are actually stupid, silly, clumsy goons. As the owner of an arcade, you've got your hands full trying to keep these nuts from stealing all your tokens. They just can't resist talking on the phone, eating popcorn, and dancing to a nearby jukebox. You're forced to subsidize their bad habits in order to keep them from stealing your money.

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JULY AUGUST 1

The latest computer trend lets the user become a detective, or a treasure hunter, or....

Interactive fiction: games that put the player in the middle of the action

BY STEVEN LEVY

A locked door. A dead man. And twelve hours to solve the murder.
— slogan for Deadline

The hottest mystery story of 1983 was not available in hard-cover or paperback. Nor was it optioned as a major motion picture or television series. No, if you wanted to test your powers of ratiocination, you had to go to your local software vendor and purchase a computer program stored on a floppy disc. Thousands of people popped it into their computers and prepared to spend around fifty hours (about one hour for each dollar they paid for the disc) trying to solve the murder (or was it suicide?) of industrialist Marshall Robner, found dead in his library of a drug overdose.

The name of this program is Deadline, and though the software industry classifies it as a computer game, it bears as much resemblance to Pac-Man, Space Invaders and The Earth Dies Screaming as it does to a tax-calculation program. Some have called it one of the first successful ventures in a genre known as interactive fiction, wherein the reader is also a participant in the action. When you read a mystery novel, you might take a guess at who the murderer is, then read on (or peek at the end) to see if your guess is correct. When you play Deadline, you become a detective. Like any good shamus, you interview suspects, sneak around for clues — anything from secret letters to fingerprint samples — and then confront the suspects with hard evidence to jar them into giving more information or even a confession.

You do all this by typing instructions, in English, into the computer. It takes a while to understand the limited format for addressing the machine, but once you do, the program allows you to assume another persona. Here is an excerpt from a recent session of mine:

COMPUTER: You are standing at the Robners' front door.

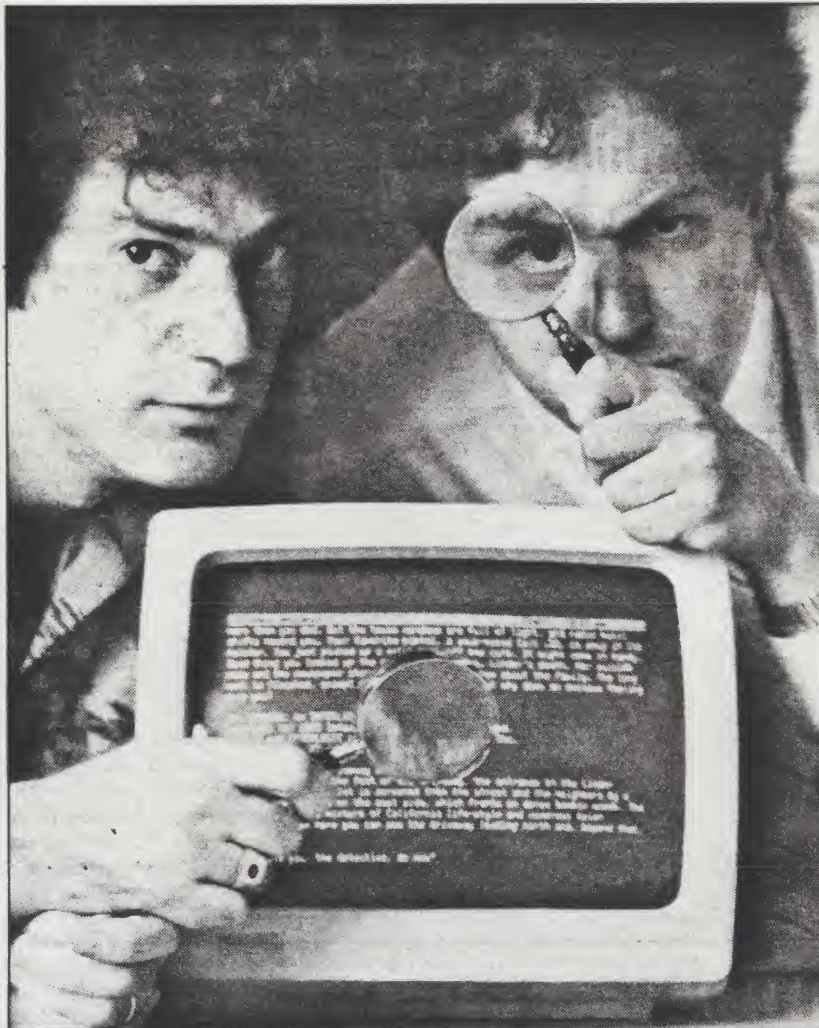
PLAYER: Enter house.

COMPUTER: The door is closed.

PLAYER: Knock on the door.

COMPUTER: You hear footsteps inside the house. Mrs. Robner, dressed in black, opens the door and greets you. "Hello," she says. "I'm afraid I really can't be of much help to you. As I said...you may look around here, but you must be out by eight o'clock at the latest." Mrs. Robner leads you into the house and closes the door behind you.

PLAYER: Mrs. Robner, tell me about Mr. Robner.



Berlyn (left) and Blank: storytellers who've adapted their art to the computer

COMPUTER: "I loved my husband, no matter what you may think. I am very sorry to have lost him." The speech is almost a set piece, and not too convincing.

You get the idea? While the prose is kind of creaky, the Deadline experience can be exhilarating, as you poke around the Robner mansion, uncover clues, send Sergeant Duffy to the lab to analyze strange white powder, and flirtatiously interrogate the mysterious Miss Dunbar. You are there.

The mind-boggling implications of all this have not escaped Marc Blank, the bookish twenty-nine-year-old computer author and corporate vice-president who wrote Deadline. Blank's company, Infocom, is the most successful publisher of this form of computer

games, and Blank has been involved in interactive fiction almost since its inception in 1977.

Unlike real novels, the interactive computer novel has an undisputed granddaddy — the original Adventure game, created in the Stanford Artificial Intelligence Lab by computer hackers Don Woods and Will Crowther. Adventure firmly established a Dungeons and Dragons scenario as the genre's prime setting. Though Adventure accepted only two-word commands and didn't develop its characters very deeply, it presented a fresh, literary, puzzle-solving challenge unprecedented on the computer. Blank, while a student at MIT, joined his friends in solving the game and then writing a more complex sequel called Zork.

When Blank and other MIT alumni formed Infocom, their first product was the microcomputer-based Zork. This program, Blank estimated, has now sold over a quarter of a million copies at \$39.95. Nine Infocom products have appeared since, and each one has been on the Softsel distributing firm's "Hot List" of best-selling computer games. But Blank is careful to note that the term *game* is an inadequate label for them.

"We call what we do 'interactive fiction' to distinguish it from mere games," says Blank, sitting at a picnic table outside the complex of Infocom's campus-style Cambridge, Massachusetts, headquarters. "It's interactive in that you are the main character."

Another Infocom author, thirty-four-year-old science-fiction writer Michael Berlyn, concurs. "In any piece of fiction, there's involvement and identification. We do classic storytelling in that we manipulate the reader by building expectations in a linear fashion. But here, there's a degree of personal involvement you can't get with books or movies. Take something like *Raiders of the Lost Ark*, where a character is about to open a door and you know something horrible is behind it. You think, 'Don't open that door!' With our games, you can act on that impulse."

Both Blank and Berlyn admit that the interactive-fiction form is relatively primitive, though they boast that the Infocom "parser" — the part of the program that translates the player's English commands into a form the computer can understand — is the best around. For the most part, interactive-fiction programs are indelibly wedded to the puzzle-solving form — the player must be motivated by some goal. Also, while the Infocom games allow you to deal realistically with objects (if your character arrives at a creek, you can fill any vessel you carry with water, be it a cup, a canteen or a hat), the kinds of discourse it allows with your fellow characters are much less varied than those in real life.

Right now, no computer program can simulate a real, no-holds-barred conversation with an imaginary character. Still, once you take the leap of faith and adhere to the rules of communication established by the program, incredible things can happen. You not only act through your computer persona, but you must figure out what kind of behavior will get you successfully through the game.

In Michael Berlyn's latest game — the search for a lost pyramid, called *Infidel* — the player assumes the role of a ruthlessly ambitious treasure hunter. "The character turned out to be not a nice person," Berlyn admits.

"One of the people testing the game complained, 'I've just insulted an entire race, ransacked and pillaged a national shrine, bilked a woman out of her life savings...and the game says, "You're a rich man! You live happily ever after!"'"

WELCOME TO NSRT CENTER.

YOUR CLEARANCE: TOP SECRET.

YOUR MISSION: EXTREMELY HAZARDOUS.

YOUR CHANCE OF SURVIVAL: MINIMAL.

After this introduction, the computer screen changes to show a control room in full color. A television set in the room is full of static, and the player must take the paddle attached to the computer and fiddle with it until the screen shows a clear shot of a jungle scene. The camera pans across what is obviously the campsite of an expedition team. Bodies are strewn, Jonestown-style, over the landscape, and tents are burning. Then a face appears — a painted native warrior. He comes closer to the camera, filling the whole screen. The screen goes blank. Your mission, should you choose to accept it, is to go deep into the Amazon and find out what happened to that team.

The game is called Amazon, and it is indicative of the latest trend in interactive fiction. New software publishers feel that interactive fiction, like regular fiction, is best handled by big-name authors like Michael Crichton (*The Terminal Man*, *Congo*), who's the creative force behind Amazon.

"We called him up, and it turned out that he had already been working on a computer game," explains Seth Godin, brand manager of the Trillium series made by Spinnaker Software. Best known as a publisher of educational software, Spinnaker is attempting to train top science-fiction writers to create interactive fiction. "There's a high correlation between computer owners and science-fiction readers," says Godin, who claims that science-fiction authors are far more qualified to turn out this kind of product than the "engineers" who do it at other companies. "Science-fiction writers are masters at building characterization through plot," he says. That's the key to good interactive fiction, circa 1984.

Crichton agrees. He had seen some of the early adventure games on the Apple, and even got hooked on some of the Hi-Res Adven-

tures (interactive fiction with pictures) put out by a company called Sierra On-Line. But he became impatient with what he called a "debugger's mentality" within the game, and thought that with his background in novels and movies, he could do better.

Working closely with a programmer, Crichton spent a year and a half refining Amazon, eliminating things that drove him crazy about previous games. For instance, the Amazon adventurer never gets stuck in maddening mazes. "I hate to get stuck — it makes me feel stupid," explains Crichton. Also, his game does not recognize the command "kill," as many games do — an admirable pacifistic ges-

devous with Rama. There is Ray Bradbury, with a follow-up to *Fahrenheit 451*. (Though enthusiastic about the project, the veteran author actually had little to do with it. "I'm just coming into the twentieth century," he says. "I just got a word processor last week!") Robert Heinlein is also represented, though, unfortunately, his classic *Stranger in a Strange Land* is too complex for the computer. "We can do an intelligent, wiseass parrot," admits Seth Godin, "but not Michael Valentine Smith," the charismatic *Stranger* protagonist.

Another company relying on science fiction is Baen Software, named after its founder, Jim Baen, a veteran sci-fi book edi-

shoot-'em-ups: "There's much less interest in hard-core action games than in the past. Now there's significant demand for the mind game as opposed to the joy-stick game."

Even former LSD-proselytizer Timothy Leary is getting into the act. Lately, he's been circulating a proposal for an interactive-fiction program called *The Adventures of Huck Finn — 100 Years After*. It would have the player rewrite the characters of Huck, Tom Sawyer, Becky Thatcher and the runaway slave Jim. For instance, you can turn Jim into Joan! Throughout the game, you keep changing the characters and settings in Mark Twain's classic to your specifications until Twain's vision yields to yours. Within minutes, Twain's great American novel could resemble a prime-time situation comedy.

"STEVEN, SNAP OUT OF IT," CRIES TIP RANDALL, bursting into your laboratory. "The alert signal is on!"

You look up from your plans for the Scimitar, a top-secret submarine that's still being tested. You notice that the alarm bell is ringing. Someone's trying to reach you over the videophone network of Inventors Unlimited!

"Okay, Steven, what do you want to do now?"

It is no coincidence that the above passage is reminiscent of the books by Victor Appleton II, the *nom de pulp* of a conglomerate of authors who turned out countless Tom Swift Jr. books in the Fifties and Sixties. It was written by Jim Lawrence, the author of dozens of Tom Swift Jr., Hardy Boys and Nancy Drew novellas. He coauthored the new Infocom game, called *Seastalker*, the first in a series of "junior level" computer adventures. Kids can now cut their reading teeth on words appearing on computer screens, and enter the dramas as characters. This game assigns the player's real name to the protagonist. And to help young undersea explorers along, *Seastalker* is more generous with hints than other games in the genre. It now retails for fifty dollars, but kids will first have to hit their parents up for a thousand dollars or so to buy the computer and disc drive required to run it.

One wonders, though, if the identification that the young players of *Seastalker* develop with their eponymous heroes will be as strong as the one that kids forged with Tom Swift Jr. Even a kid with almost nothing in common with young Tom — a well-off blond know-it-all who could invent state-of-the-art weaponry — could easily fire his imagination so that he would, in essence, be Tom.

As the slogan for Jim Baen Software reads, "The Future Is Now." Interactive fiction is here, and as it gets better, it might well deliver some of the pleasures of its wiser, deeper, big brother — the book. As it stands, the better interactive fiction on the marketplace is engrossing enough to keep players staring at the screen and racking their brains for ways to save cryogenic societies or eliminate forces of evil in enchanted lands. The passion that players bring to these games comes from the same source as all fiction-induced pleasure — the projection of self into another world and the desire to learn what happens next as the adventures unfold. Only in this case, it's up to you to determine what happens next. And that can be a lot more challenging than turning a page. ●

'When a character in a movie is about to open a door and you know something horrible is behind it,' says Berlyn, 'you think, "Don't open that door!" With our games, you can act on that impulse.'

ture marred by Amazon's arcade-type game-within-a-game, where you gun down Huni warriors, skeet-shoot style.

Crichton found that despite the differences between interactive fiction and books, "you can't get away from telling a story." Also, to Crichton's disappointment, by the time he had finished designing his game, other companies had already matched some of the advances he had made in the genre. For example, one Amazon feature is the relationship between the player-protagonist and a sidekick he adopts along the way, a smart, wisecracking parrot named Paco. In the interim, Infocom came out with a game called *Planetfall*, where the player's partner is a friendly robot named Floyd. So it goes in the high-tech fiction race.

Other Trillium software authors are very hot names in science fiction. There is Arthur C. Clarke, with a computer version of his *Ren-*

tor. He's managed to get such notable authors as Fred Saberhagen, Jerry Pournelle and Larry Niven to help create programs that will be distributed by Simon and Schuster. The games will combine action and text, and Baen envisions a software package that will also include the novels on which the games are based.

Then there is Synapse Software, a company mainly known for its fast-action computer games. The firm plans to release a series of ten "electronic novels" — text-only adventure games in which the player's attitude in addressing the game's fictional characters will determine how the characters react. "For example," says Synapse's Jon Loveless, "you come across a panhandler. You can't get rid of him unless you act the right way." Loveless is frank in explaining why Synapse is delving into a more literate form of software than

New VCR combines portability with Beta Hi-Fi sound

The words *portability* and *Beta Hi-Fi* seem incongruous. Portability suggests the mobility of making movies and videos on location, while Beta Hi-Fi usually relates to home stereo systems that are too heavy to take around town. However, Aiwa's three-piece V-5 Beta Hi-Fi VCR system (about \$1395) combines the advantages of both in one neat package.

The V-5 system includes the AV-50M (a VCR recorder with a built-in 105-channel, seven-day/one-event tuner/timer), the SV-50M (a Beta Hi-Fi adapter with built-in amplifier) and a nine-mode remote control. You

can use the VCR-tuner combination for on-location shoots, then return home and play high-grade videotape with the audio oomph of Beta Hi-Fi. You'll have to provide the speakers — but not the rest of your home stereo system. This is as portable as Beta Hi-Fi gets.

There is, of course, a catch to all this convenience: the AV-50M VCR/tuner/timer combination weighs 13.7 pounds — roughly twice as much as a portable VCR. Still, there are many commendable features. The VCR is capable of five-hour recording-playback time (in Beta III) and features automatic program

location, audio dubbing, insert editing and two-speed multisearch.

The SV-50M Beta Hi-Fi adapter has the standard Beta Hi-Fi dynamic range of eighty decibels and a frequency response of 20 hertz to 20,000 hertz. Its five-watt-per-channel integrated amplifier can be used independently, or as a preamp when connected to a home audio system. It also carries a Dynamic Super Loudness switch for boosting bass levels at low volumes and a multiplex filter switch that can be used to access stereo or bilingual broadcasts when network TV becomes stereo-ready later this year. —MARTIN PORTER

SCREENING ROOM

THE RATING GAME

AMAZON

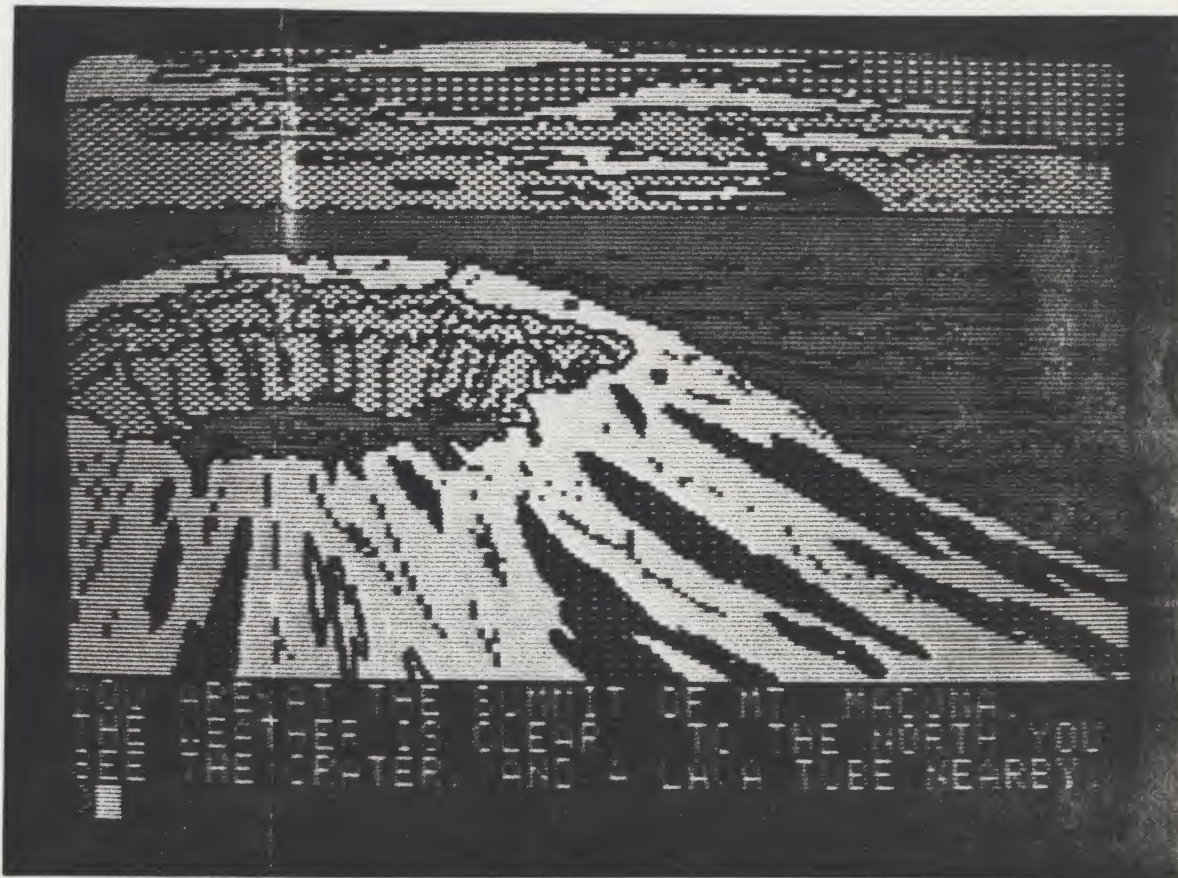
Reviewed on Apple, 64K (disk). Also available for Commodore 64 (disk). Trillium, One Kendall Square, Cambridge, MA 02139; (617) 494-1200. \$32.95 (Commodore 64); \$39.95 (Apple)

GRAPHICS:	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
EXCITEMENT:	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
ORIGINALITY:	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
EASE OF USE:	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
CHALLENGE:	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
SHELF LIFE:	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>

Trillium has started out on the right foot with its first release, a unique and exciting graphic adventure called *Amazon*. Combining great graphics, some arcade action, and a story by science-fiction author Michael Crichton, *Amazon* tops every other graphic adventure.

Your mission, should you choose to accept it, is to journey to the Amazon and recover the lost emeralds of Chak (which are more than mere gems). Along the way you meet Paco, an intelligent talking parrot. With his help and by communicating with Washington, D.C. via computer, you bravely trek through the depths of the jungle. Before you're through, you'll encounter head-hunting natives, corrupt government troops, ferocious man-eating animals, and others.

Graphically, *Amazon* is a masterpiece, with many vivid colors, clear illustrations, and even some animation. A welcome change of pace is the occasional bit of arcade action, which gives your fingers more exercise than just typing. The sound effects are few but good.



Amazon pulls together some of the best and most popular ideas of many recent books, movies, and games. For instance, the excitement and atmosphere are a bit like Indiana Jones' adventures. And Paco, who acts as an advisor/friend, reminds me of Floyd, the robot from Infocom's text adventure *Planetfall*.

On the other hand, it also has

many of its own innovations. You can choose three difficulty levels. While the basic plot remains the same, subtle changes alter it significantly. These features make for a thrilling and occasionally funny adventure. Definitely not to be missed.

DAVID LANGENDOEN, 16
Brooklyn, New York

THE RATING S

Software is rated on a scale of 1 to 5 in each of six categories:

POOR	<input type="checkbox"/>
FAIR	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
GOOD	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
VERY GOOD	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
EXCELLENT	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
NOT APPLICABLE = N/A	

GRAPHICS: The quality and sophistication of the graphics, given the computer's capabilities.

EXCITEMENT: The pace, pulse, and action of the game.

ORIGINALITY: The degree to which it's a trailblazer.

EASE OF USE: Its boot-up playability and simplicity. A low rating doesn't mean it's a poor game.

CHALLENGE: This speaks for itself.

SHELF LIFE: Its ability to maintain interest over time and not grow stale.

Deadline and The Witness are mysteries where we became the detectives. We had to be in the right place at the right time. Events that took place out of our sight were lost. We "saved" endlessly and had good luck. Deadline was more complex but we appreciated the hard-boiled "Philip Marlowe" flavor of The Witness. Talk to everyone and examine everything for clues. You will be surprised at what people will tell you under different circumstances. The backgrounds are detailed and realistic.

Flying across the center of the "Artifact" in Starcross is a real adventure. We had some serious holdups in this game so it took nearly as long as Zork I. The hardest part was making the round trip to and from the weasels' vessel alive. A large part of the game was deciding what to do with all the rods. The most satisfying puzzle was learning to follow the compulsively neat maintenance mouse into the mouse holes. Another problem was persuading the bored

Gurthark to accompany us. Being rewarded with the title "Galactic Overlord" pleased us sci-fi buffs.

Planetfall is probably our all-time favorite. We had a lump in the throat when Floyd the robot sang "The Ballad of the Star-Crossed Miner". Floyd was entertaining and surprisingly helpful. The giant microbe was our worst pitfall. It took an embarrassing amount of time to get rid of that big bug.

Infidel was an old-fashioned adventure. We became an unscrupulous selfish second-rate archaeologist. (It might be slightly uncomfortable for nice people.) We spent about eight fast-paced hours on Infidel. One of us anticipated Egyptian technology and the other is a cryptology fiend who decoded the hieroglyphics. The program was very orderly and ended suitably.

OUR ADVICE

Our best advice is to map and document carefully. A printer makes solv-

ing a little easier.

Study the packaging thoroughly before beginning and refer back occasionally for hints which become obvious.

Most items you take have one purpose but in one game we needed a piece of equipment in three different locations.

Try anything. Read *everything* the computer tells you. An answer may amuse or insult you, or be just what you hoped for. A slight variation in computer response is usually an important clue.

When you begin, explore only. When you can gather what you think you will need and are ready to be serious, make a "good save" in as few moves as possible. Don't save over this because some of your later choices are irrevocable. After that, save frequently as suggested in the instructions.

If you are lucky you will find an imaginative friend who is willing to give up a normal life to adventure with you. **A**

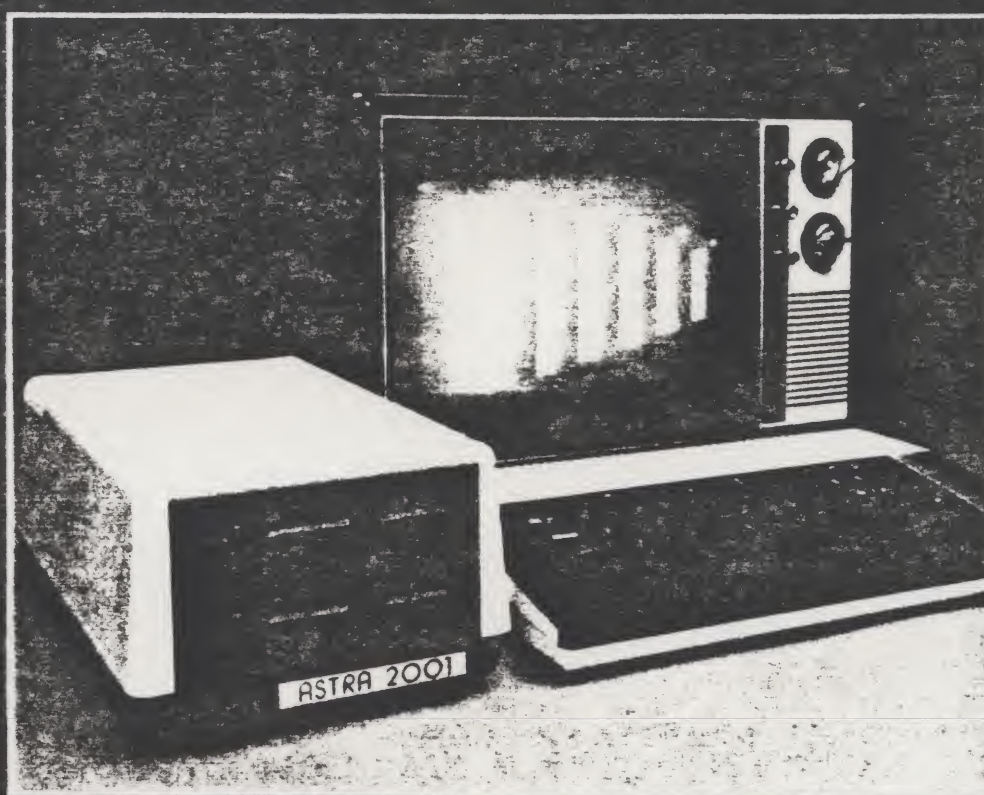
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bouncing on them. They hatch, by the way, into an assortment of creatures. Some are not the types you want to get close to—purple creatures, for instance. Others, such as pink elephants, don't harm you and are easily destroyed. Tops spin around and undo your work.

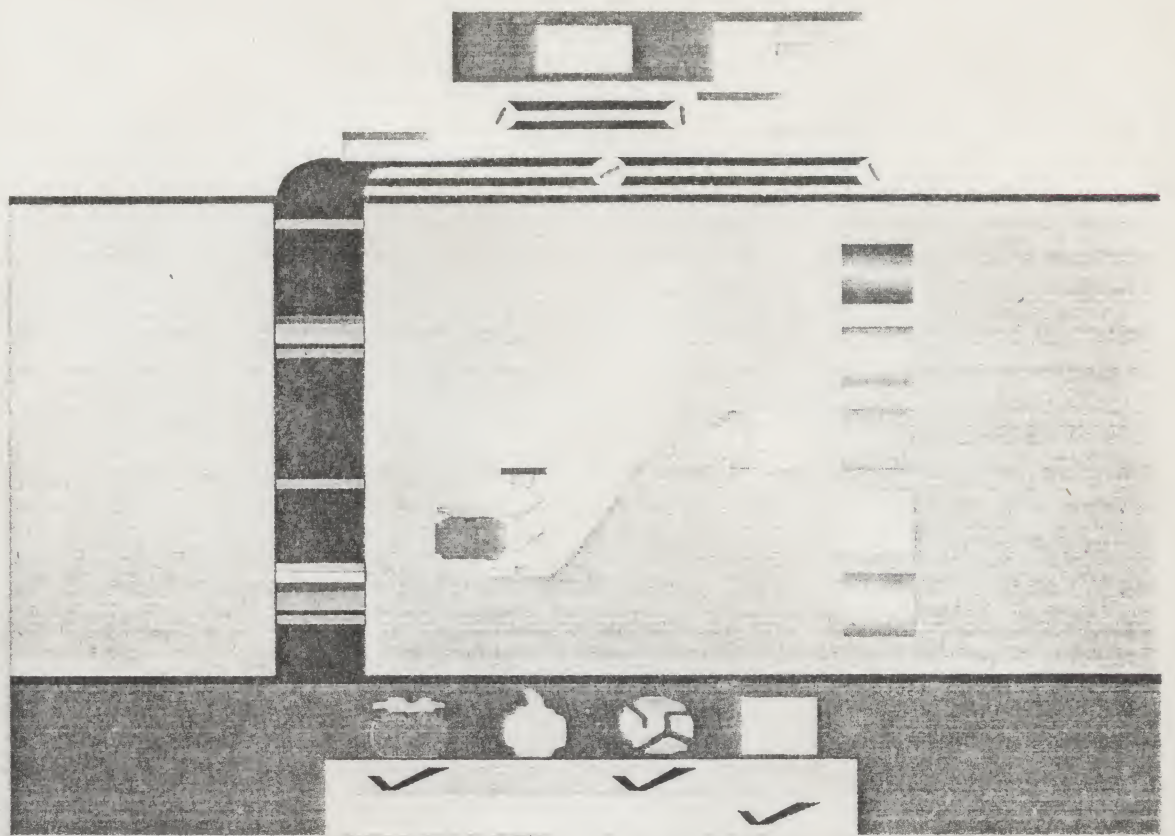
Each screen is a planned geometric pattern. It may look random, but there's method to this madness. Thus, with a little study, you can figure out how to go about your task most efficiently without endangering yourself. If you do it really well, you can even save all the flashing green cylinders (which disintegrate your enemies) until the end. —Randi Hacker

Pressure Cooker ■■■

Activision/VCS

As you might have already guessed, *Pressure Cooker* casts you as a cook. The object here is to simply fill burger orders and the way you go about it is no more organized or interesting than the way it is done at Burger King. The pressure part comes into play the moment you tap the reset switch.

First you must read the electronic order board that runs along the bottom of the screen. Up to three burger orders will appear at any one time. The board contains four columns; one for onions, another for tomatoes, and the remaining two for cheese and lettuce. Say, for example, line one has a check mark in the tomato column. To fill this order you must catch a tomato as it flies out of the condiment machine and carry it over to the conveyor belt. After dropping it on one of the burgers you must then move to the bottom of the screen and catch a bun. Now carry the bun over to your tomato-garnished burger and lift your creation off the belt. With burger in hand, you leave the assembly room and enter the wrapping room. Here you'll find three wrapping machines—one blue, one red and one green. The idea here is to drop the finished burger into the appropriate machine. To find out which burger goes where, you must again consult the order board. One of



the lines will be flashing. Its color corresponds to that of the proper machine.

This procedure might sound highly organized but actually it isn't. While you're busy reading orders, the condiment machine is even busier spitting out condiments in a most haphazard manner. If, for example, one burger requires onions you must reject whatever other condiments that the machine tosses out at you. If they sail clear across the assembly room unchecked, or worse yet, hit your chef, you lose some of your performance points.

To its credit, *Pressure Cooker* is a good test of one's memory. Success depends on your ability to look, retain and execute in an efficient manner. On the minus side though, the game is much too repetitive to qualify as fun. Furthermore, I have to give this game poor marks for originality. In both a visual and conceptual sense, *Pressure Cooker* emulates a number of past VCS cartridges such as CommaVid's forgettable *Cakewalk*. One could liken *Pressure Cooker* in a loose sense to *BurgerTime*, but it lacks charm and lunacy—two qualities responsible for that game's popularity.

—Michael Blanchet

Planetfall ■■■■

Infocom/At, Ap, C64, IBM

From the second you open the

package to this rollicking outer space adventure you know you are in for a good time, and the fun never lets up. Of all the Infocom text adventures we've played so far, *Planetfall* is the ideal combination of brain-testing and satisfaction. Here's what you get in addition to your program disk: One (1) Stellar Patrol ID Card (destruction of which is "punishable by death"); three (3) picture post cards from outer space ("Wriggle on over to NEBULON! Home fo the WORM PEOPLE"); one (1) diary (complete with doodles) belonging to the lowliest of the low space cadets (you).

Even with all this support material, however, you still have no idea of what you're supposed to do in *Planetfall* until you're about a third of the way through the adventure. What you do a lot of is exploring, and *Planetfall* gives you lots of real estate to poke around in. You also get to drive a subway train and sing a ballad to a robot.

The authors have spared no imagination in devising the subtle details sprinkled throughout. There's the Esperanto of outer space, for instance—something called Galalingua. In Galalingua, "Infocom games" is translated "Infokom gaamz". Early on, an ambassador from some unpronounceable planet hands you a brochure describing these futuristic entertainments. If you happen to run

HITS AND MISSILES

across the brochure later in the adventure the computer will say, "Unfortunately, one of those stupid brochures is here."

The authors also pay due homage to one of their inspirations, the classic radio drama and series of books, *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy*. It's not long before you find a towel inscribed with the reassuring phrase, "Don't Panic!" Although the *Hitchhiker's Guide* recommends that you "always carry a towel", never jump to conclusions—there are enough red herrings in *Planetfall* to fill a whole other adventure game. In fact, when you get to the end you are even promised a sequel. Don't miss the sequel to this review, by the way, in which I tell you about the time I helped someone sharpen a pencil. —George Kopp

Lock 'n' Chase ■■■■ Mattel/Ap, IBM

Here's a cops and robbers maze game which is close enough to its arcade parent to satisfy old fans, and original enough to inspire a whole new audience.

You get six thieves to start. There are ten levels of mazes. Pick up the gold

coins in each maze and score extra points by nabbing bonuses: sacks of money, hats, crowns, briefcases, and telephones.

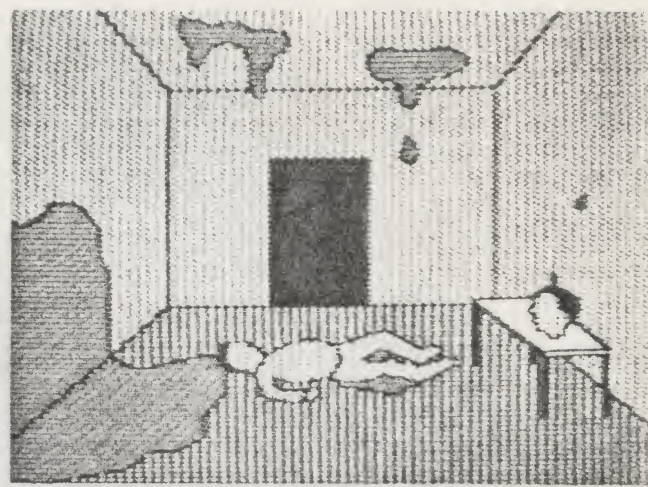
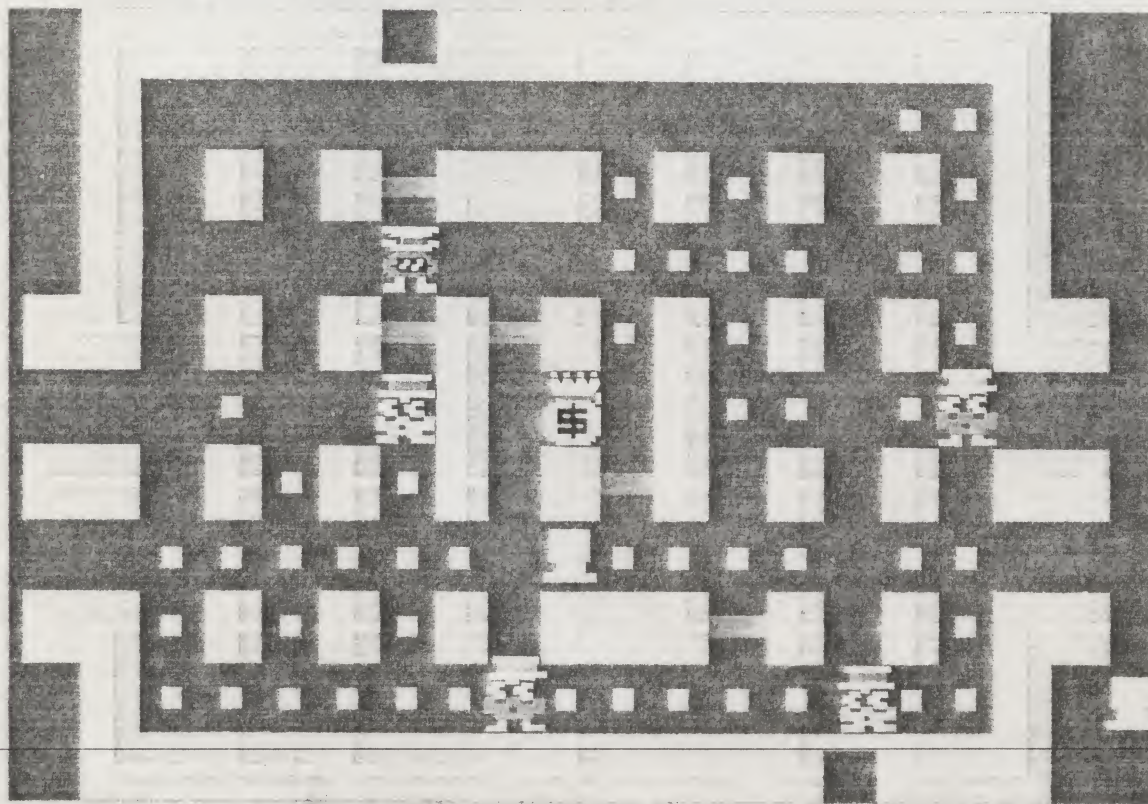
Instead of Stuffy, Smarty, Silly and Scaredy of the coin-op, your opponents here are simply called the police. (And I don't mean Stewart, Andy and Sting.) There are four of these squat enforcers on every screen. You can outrun them and, in a pinch, give them the slip through a side door.

One interesting feature (reminiscent of *Pengo* and *Ladybug*) is your ability to build walls behind you, blocking the coppers' way. Using your S key or fire button you can erect a temporary barrier at the last junction you pass. It dissolves after a few seconds. Make sure you only use it when a cop is trailing you—if there's a cop in front of you, you run the risk of locking yourself in the same sector as him.

Four cash bags appear in each maze and each one has a greater point value than the last. The fourth one is worth a whopping 4,000 points. Hats, which are the same color as the maze, are only worth 200 points.

All in all *Lock 'n' Chase* is a well-paced, intelligently designed maze game which just goes to show that crime does pay.

—Marc Berman



Crypt of Medea ■■■■ Sir Tech/Ap

There is a great deal of blood, gore and mayhem in *Crypt of Medea*; blood, gore and mayhem of the sort that hasn't been seen since those EC comics of the fifties.

Hi-res adventure? Hi-grossout-quotient adventure is more like it. Among the goodies you'll encounter as you make your way through a lot of rooms with "no visible exits" are a decapitated head with a steel rod skewered through it, some vicious Jell-o that apparently eats humans instead of the other way around, a decapitated dog and much, much more. Your way is treacherous, of course, and if you do something wrong, you're told so in no uncertain terms. Be careful what you reply. Though most adventure games don't recognize four-letter words, this one actually understands them. Type one in and an avenging angel appears to relieve you of your possessions and demand an apology.

There are several other ways of dying in this game, all of them very grisly. You'll want to try them all. That's the most fun you'll have. Because unfortunately, *Crypt of Medea* doesn't give the player any real task to complete. The only object, aside from staying alive, is to get out of the labyrinthine series of ravines, tunnels, laboratories and mausoleums you find yourself in. Part of the appeal of adventure games is that the player is assigned something to do and has to stay alive while doing it: saving a planet from destruction, finding a treasure, vanquishing an evil wizard; that sort of thing. *Crypt of Medea* offers no such purpose.

—Glenn Kenny

you just did. There are no bells or whistles to distract you. Every function is worthwhile and serves a useful purpose. While user interface seems a little primitive, Omniwriter's power is worthy of respect.

Thomas Howe
Mill Valley, CA

NaturalLink

System Requirements: Texas Instruments Personal Computer; 128Kb; modem; a color monitor is helpful.

Manufacturer: Texas Instruments Data Systems Group, Box 402430, H-666-A, Dallas, TX 75240.

Price: \$150, including Dow Jones subscription.

It's been several months now since Texas Instruments invited me to its local presentation of the first TI NaturalLink to the Dow Jones' services. I watched with awe while the program was put through its paces. I then brought it home with me to try out.

But I couldn't really convince myself that a review of this package was something that should be done. Something isn't quite right about it. Since it is now time to turn in the equipment, in fairness to my obligation, here's the review.

TI's claims about this package are impressive. When using this software, it says, you have only to select from a variety of options presented in screen-displayed windows and then piece those options together into an intelligent sentence. Absolutely true. Fig. 2 shows the program's main menu. Fig. 3 demonstrates the selection of two different commands. On the screen, in the top set of windows, are the various questions that may be appended to the stub "What", which appears at the top of the screen. In the middle is the list of stock market companies for which the file contains NYSE abbreviations. Next comes the qualifying statements of stock exchange location, and in the lower row, statements of information source and period.

... But Artificial Intelligence?

TI states that the product is a database software package that allows users to access the Dow Jones News/Retrieval service using plain and simple English. This is almost true. There are no database concepts in use here—simply a few flat files, one which holds the abbreviations of the stocks you are interested in, and some others which hold your communications and user-profile parameters.

Manipulation of the screen is impressive. Windows scroll where necessary, and those areas under inspection are highlighted, particularly if you use a color display. NaturalLink does indeed provide easily selected commands, and to that extent, the product has merit, as anything which will simplify your life is beneficial.

Be forewarned:
completing the
challenge of Planetfall
is no small task.
At the very least,
it will take you many,
many hours...

One of the nice things about the package is that you can prepare a file of questions for batch submission. If you want information about the same ten stocks every day, the batch submission is the least expensive way to go, particularly if the computer is prepared to simply download the information for later review.

Once you have constructed your sentence and gained access to the Dow Jones network (I used TYMNET), you do have access to the normal DJ command structure, so you aren't directly limited to the use of the NaturalLink program. There were, however, a couple of times during my test that I found there was no graceful exit—I had no recourse but to shut the machine off and start again.

The program is a capable and worthwhile tool, but I'm not convinced that it is the artificial intelligence breakthrough that TI claims it to be. My concept of artificial intelligence is that the program should assist you when you have difficulties and learn by mistakes, modifying the program as those facts are learned.

The translation from simple English (whose precise form is known) to the DJ command structure (whose precise form is also known) isn't a difficult concept to accomplish from a software point of view. The program knows which option was selected and constructs the DJ command calls accordingly. This is the kind of program that is, in concept at least, a first year trainee project.

The presentation by TI was impressive, until I got the opportunity to really digest what the company was offering. TI has a good product, but that product may well be misrepresented by calling it the result of "extensive research into artificial intelligence," as the company claims. A good product should rest on its merits, and this program has plenty of merit for its ability to bridge the awkward DJ command structure by providing a translation capability. The product's value is diminished by the hype.

Ken Lord
Winchendon, MA

Planetfall

System Requirements: IBM PC; 48Kb RAM, one 5¼-inch disk drive; any IBM-compatible display (also available for a variety of other systems).

Manufacturer: Infocom, Inc., 55 Wheeler St., Cambridge, MA 02138.

Price: \$49.95.

Congratulations! You've finally made it into the Stellar Patrol. You have been assigned to the Stellar Patrol Ship Feinstein and issued an official uniform, ID card and a self-contained, multipurpose, all-weather scrub brush.

Battling on a New Frontier

Scrub brush? Yes, scrub brush. It seems that the Stellar Patrol is not all that it's cracked up to be—at least according to Planetfall, a lighthearted new adventure game from Infocom, makers of the Zork trilogy, Deadline, Starcross and other adventure games.

In Planetfall, instead of conquering aliens and exploring new worlds, you're assigned to the ignominious duty of scrubbing one of the S.P.S. Feinstein's filthiest decks—mostly as a result of falling afoul of your immediate superior, Ensign Blather—until an accident rocks the ship, catapulting you into a strange world and a challenging mission. The mission is to figure out where you are and what the problem is, and—with the help of a talkative robot named Floyd—to correct the problem.

Be forewarned: completing the challenge of Planetfall is no small task. At the very least, it will take you many, many hours, and depending on whether the lawn needs mowing, the driveway needs shoveling or your family would like to spend some time with you, it could take months.

Planetfall's documentation comes in the form of a Stellar Patrol packet, complete with a promotional brochure for the Patrol (which also manages to explain the rules of the game), an official ID card, a few pages from your diary and postcards from some of the exotic planets that you have visited.

But the real uniqueness of Planetfall is its ability to converse with players in complete sentences, the trademark of an Infocom game. Whereas early adventure games required you to make commands such as "Go door", Planetfall allows you to use complete sentences such as, "Hit the short alien with the curved rod."

Once you have booted up Planetfall, you should avail yourself of the opportunity to make the one backup that you are allowed. Losing your disk in the middle of the game is a good way to induce apoplexy.

You should also immediately begin to make a map of your surroundings. Anyone who can complete an Infocom game without a map gets my vote for the Amazing Kreskin Memory Award. You'll

also want to learn how to save a position so that you won't have to start over from scratch each time you start the game or meet an untimely demise.

Wait for the Climax

Planetfall is a fun, challenging adventure game, so don't be put off by the fact that, like Infocom's earlier game Starcross, it starts off too slowly—you basically have to sit there and wait for the climactic event (it seems there is always a climactic event in Infocom games these days): the explosion of your ship and landing on the alien planet. Don't worry, you'll have plenty to do after you land, and plenty of challenging but solvable puzzles to keep you intrigued for quite awhile.

Planetfall has been billed by Infocom as the first "space comedy," but it is more like a good lighthearted mystery, not too easy to figure out (lest you get bored) and not too difficult (lest you become frustrated).

Infocom has another winner with Planetfall. The lawn, the driveway and the family may just have to wait.

Ken Sheldon
Peterborough, NH

B/Graph 1.0

System Requirements: Atari Personal Computer; 48Kb RAM; Atari 8Kb Basic; two disk drives are recommended.

Manufacturer: Inhome Software, Inc., 2485 Dunwin Drive, Unit 8, Mississauga, Ontario, L5L 1T1 Canada.

Price: \$99.

B/Graph is a professional graphics charting and statistical analysis program for any Atari Personal Computer designed to be used by individuals in sales, marketing, administration, forecasting and general management, as well as in home and small business applications.

B/Graph comes with more than 160 pages of documentation, the bulk of which is a beginner's tutorial in statistical analysis and graphing. Also included are a seven-page forward on graphing, appendixes on photographing the screen and color artifacting and a short bibliography. In addition to the ten program

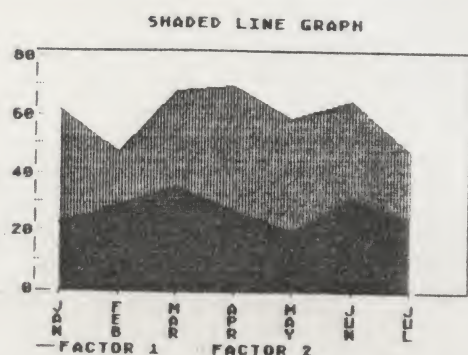


Fig. 4. Shaded two-factor line graph.

B/Graph's
documentation is
excellent, among the
best I've seen
in 21 years of
dealing with computers.

modules, the two program disks contain numerous demonstration graphs and tutorial examples.

The documentation is excellent, among the best I've seen in 21 years of dealing with computers. The tutorials lead you step-by-step through a complex and powerful set of programs without being condescending. The only weak points are the tutorials dealing with statistics; there's only so much you can introduce in 14 pages.

It's apparent that the authors spent a considerable amount of time on the human factors of B/Graph. Most commands are single keystrokes. Many can be entered while a graph is on the screen. An effort was made to make these the initial letters of keywords, but the constraints of having no two keywords start with the same letter leads to some minor inconsistencies: the Color command sets the hue of the display, Hue sets the luminance of the background and Intensity sets the luminance of the plotted data.

While using B/Graph, you can always press the option key to return to a menu if you forget what you're doing or what you need to do next. Data and graphs are never lost until you load in other files or exit to another program without saving your data. Before you exit, you are always asked if you wish to save your data. When you attempt to load or save a file, you have the option of obtaining a disk directory.

Printer Particulars

Upon loading B/Graph, you are first

presented with the printer selection menu. You are asked to select one of the following graphics printers: Centronics, Epsom/Gemini, C.Itoh/Prowriter/NEC, Seikosha AT/100 or Okidata 92. Even if you don't have a printer, or don't wish to use one, you must still select one of the printers to proceed.

It is unlikely that after initial startup and printer selection you will need this menu again, but in the event that you have inadvertently chosen the wrong printer or wish to change printers in mid-session, you may return to this menu from the program selection menu. This is appreciated, as other programs require you to reboot your system.

An addendum to the documentation states that the Okidata 92 is not 100 percent compatible with B/Graph's screen dump routine. Printer dumps performed with this model printer will show an occasional missing dot or line of dots. The addendum further states that it is "anticipated" that a custom Okidata screen dump will be provided in a future version of B/Graph.

Program Selection

Having selected a printer, you are presented with the program selection menu. It is through this menu that you move from module to module within B/Graph. You can return to this menu from any of the other program modules at any time. A copy of this menu is present on both program disks, so you need not swap disks when moving from program to program on the same disk. Should you need to swap disks, the program informs you of this at the appropriate time—a very nice touch.

• **Graphing:** This module lets you create bar graphs, 3-D bar graphs, segmented bar graphs, floating bar graphs, line graphs, scatter graphs and market graphs. Figs. 4-6 are examples of B/Graph's output.

Of the 15 different graphics and text modes Atari computers can handle, the one with the highest resolution is Graphics Mode 8, with a resolution of 320 dots horizontally by 192 dots vertically. This is the mode that B/Graph uses for all its graphs and charts.

You can create graphs with one to three factors, each with from two to 100

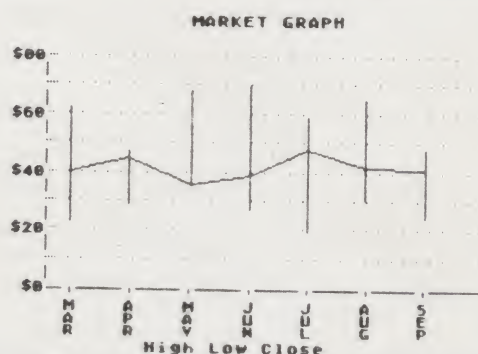
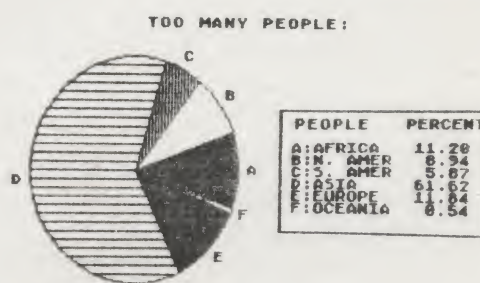


Fig. 5. Seven-month market graph.



1979 WORLD CENSUS

Fig. 6. Pie chart and legends.

Micro-Reviews



NAME: Parthian Kings
TYPE: Strategic/Fantasy
SYSTEM: Apple II
AUTHOR: David W. Bradley
#PLAYERS: 1 to 4
PRICE: \$25
PUBLISHER: Avalon Hill
 Baltimore, MD

The King is dead, and the kingdom is in chaos. Who will gain control of the fallen crown? Will it be you, or one of your less worthy opponents? Only you can decide the issue, with your decisions turning the balance for or against your casue. The King is dead! Will you be the next to mount the throne?

In **PARTHIAN KINGS** (PK), each player must make several early decisions which may press him to an early victory, or condemn him to an inevitable defeat. This is due to the fact that the players control many factors not usually given to manipulation. These factors include in order of their occurrence: the name and characteristics of their army's units, the selection of their capitol from the available towns, and the make-up of their armies from the previously designed units. The players must also decide on several factors which concern them all equally. These include the map's terrain, the number of towns and their features, the number of players (up to four, with the computer being able to control up to three of these), and whether or not magic is to be used.

One of the two most important decisions that the player must make is the design of his army's units. Each unit type is first named, then assigned hit points, attack strength, long or short or no range fire, armor factor, and a movement allowance. The computer will then, using the information specified, determine the unit's cost and give you the option of accepting the created unit type or rejecting it and trying again. As you are limited to creating only five unit types, their design is critical and will either help or haunt you throughout the game.

The other decision that you need to consider carefully is the selection of your capitol. If you are the third or fourth player, then you may be faced with the least of evils for a choice. It is for this reason that the last player(s) should be given the task of placing all or some of the towns. This caution is justified due to the fact that if your capitol falls, you then lose the ability to raise taxes or create new units.

There are two different army designs to consider based on the choice to have magic or none in your game. If the game is without magic, then it is best to have a well balanced design for your army's units, as both the weakest and strongest possible units have their uses. This is changed considerably by the introduction of magic. Due to a spell which your wizard will normally gain early in the game (OSCARDE, which randomly adds to the number of one of your five types of units), it is advantageous to have one inexpensive but balanced unit and four maximum units. This would mean that the successful casting of this spell would give you an 80% chance of gaining units, each of which would normally cost an entire turn's income early in the game. This can give you a great advantage at a point when you can reap the greatest benefit. It can, however, be turned against you should you allow an opponent to bring his wizard within range of your capitol, due to the reversed effect this same spell has when cast upon enemy towns.

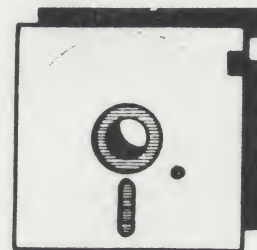
One potentially weak point of PK is its lack of a save game option. This is largely made up for, however, by the inclusion of an option which allows the players to specify a long or a short game. The long game continues until there is a sole King. With the selection of the short game, the number of turns in the game is determined by the plays (five turns being suggested for a short game).

Other features of PK include very good solitaire play, a well written and clearly laid out rule book, and the ability to save your army designs and scenario maps on a separate disk (actually this latter ability is required). One wonders why, considering the mandatory saving of these factors on disk, the game itself could not be saved to disk. Just another of life's little mysteries.

Parthian Kings is a very challenging game due to the large role the player has in developing the factors which determine his starting position. The play goes smoothly once the dynamics of unit movement is mastered and combines with the setup options to give you a

tremendous feeling of control. As a good example of the new crop of military games with a fantasy setting, PK has those features which should insure that you will continue to play it for a long time to come. The King is dead, and the Kingdom waits to find out who will next mount the throne.

Curtis Edwards



NAME: Planetfall
TYPE: S.F. Adventure
SYSTEM: Many
#PLAYERS: 1
AUTHOR: Steve Meretsky
PRICE: \$49.95
PUBLISHER: Infocom Inc.
 Cambridge, MA

Planetfall is a text adventure game that begins with you, a lowly ensign, scrubbing the decks of the Stellar Patrol Ship *Feinstein*. Your life has never seemed worse, and your future looks very bleak, boring, and uneventful. Right about this time your ship is rocked by an explosion. In order to save your life you rush to the nearest escape pod and are jettisoned out into space. By using your wits, you are able to ride the escape pod down to the nearest inhabited planet. There you are marooned on one of two islands on the planet.

Your mission, besides finding food and a safe place to sleep, is to get rescued from the planet. But your first order of business is survival. Finding a safe place to sleep is not difficult but you must find food before your emergency ration kit runs out. Once you have the food supply and know where it's safe to sleep you can begin your real adventure (Watch out! In this adventure you can even get sick and dream while you sleep.)

On the island you will find two huge deserted complexes which must be mapped (Kalamontee and Lawanda). In your wandering through the first complex you will meet a robot named Floyd. In the beginning, Floyd might be a nuisance because of his incessant babbling, but as you have probably already guessed he

plays an important part in the completion of the game. Floyd's interaction is a very unique concept in this game. It adds animation to the game without relying on graphics. (In certain parts of the complex I had already mapped I found myself hurrying through the rooms. As this left Floyd far behind, I ended up slowing down to wait for Floyd to catch up.)

There are more than 100 rooms in Planetfall and each one has its own very detailed description. Part of the enjoyment to these games is just reading these descriptions. I found myself wanting to know more about the complex — why for example, it was deserted, and where all the people went.

The puzzles in Planetfall involve special access cards, tools, and the fixing of machines that have broken down. I found the solutions to be logical with just enough depth to give me problems but not enough to cause me aggravation.

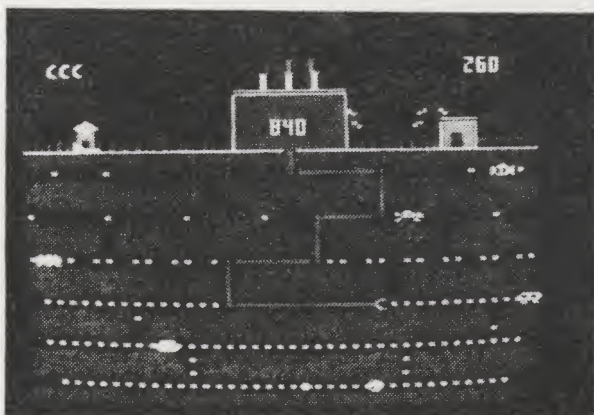
The documentation is almost as enjoyable as the game itself. With the software you get a diary, post cards, an I.D. card, and a manual. The diary looks handwritten and is on Stellar Patrol letterhead, it tells about a few days of the Ensign's boring life. The post cards are very funny. The manual as always should be read carefully. Often the problems you run into throughout the game can be made easier with the help of some clues or explanations from the manual.

For those of you that are text game or

Infocom fanatics this is another excellent adventure to add to your collection. The addition of Floyd the robot as your partner is a unique boost to the interactive nature of these games and I hope to see more of this type of creative innovation in future games.

For those of you who have never played these types of games before, Planetfall would be a good place to start.

James A. McPherson



NAME: Oil's Well
TYPE: Arcade
SYSTEM: Apple, Atari, C-64, Coleco
FORMAT: Disk or Cartridge
#PLAYERS: 1
AUTHOR: Thomas Mitchell
PUBLISHER: Sierra On-Line
 Coarsegold, CA

Oil's Well (OW) develops the old "clean out the maze" concept in a fun, new way. To see OW in your mind's arcade do this:

NAME: Conquering Worlds
TYPE: Space War Game
SYSTEM: Apple II
FORMAT: Disk
#PLAYERS: 1 to 3
AUTHOR: Walt Hochbrueckner
PRICE: \$29.95
PUBLISHER: Datamost

CONQUERING WORLDS is a space wargame with both strategic and arcade action. As the Supreme Commander of your civilization you must conquer and capture planets from the enemy(s) civilization(s).

There are two types of games that you can pick from; you can either choose to defeat all of your opponents or to conquer all of the planets. There doesn't appear to be any difference in the way the game is played under either type. It just makes a difference as to how the game is scored in the end. Whichever is picked, when the end occurs the computer will calculate your score, and keep a record of it.

You are able to play against the robot (computer) alone or you can also have up to two additional human players. Depending on the size of the game you desire you can also choose from 4 to 32 star systems where each star has 2 to 8 planets in orbit.

Each turn of the game covers a period of 10 years. During these 10 years (120

months) you can move your ships between planets or between stars as well as change the location of your base. Since you can only get detailed information on the star system where your base is you have to move your base to get new information. You have to be careful here because, when you move your base between star systems, there is a random chance that the star system you warp to will be completely controlled by the enemy and you will have to battle it out to the end. If you lose, you not only lose your ships but your base as well.

When you warp to a new star system or planet and attack you enter the arcade mode. If you do not care to do the arcade game you can preset the game parameters and have the computer determine the outcome. (The arcade portion became repetitious and uninteresting after a few rounds so I changed over to the automatic mode, with no real loss). The arcade shoot-em-up results are based strictly on who has the last ship still flying around, so I always tried to attack with around 7 to 9 ships. This way the screen is not too crowded with my ships, which would increase the chance of a random hit, but would also be of a substantial quantity so that I would have at least 2 chances to attack. Each attack wave is a countdown of 100 time units which typically takes 30

Continued on p. 35

imagine Pac-Man on a tether that you can retract with the touch of a button. He enters at the top center of the maze and snakes his way at right angles munching up dots (oil pellets) and avoiding the touch of his foes (Oozies and Land Mines) who continuously glide across the screen. Clear out one screen and you get another, tougher one. Essentially that's Oil's Well.

You can select three speeds for the Oozies and Land Mines. The speeds are cutely named Regular, Unleaded, and Premium. Regular is reasonable, and Unleaded is tough. Premium, though, is so fast that it might have been more appropriately named Rocket Fuel.

In the more difficult mazes there's less distance between some turns and there are fewer easy routes — a feature which makes it more challenging for you to get to some of the Oil Pellets. After you mine an oil field, your refinery (located at the top one-fourth of the screen) appears closer to completion. If you clear out all eight of your fields you can retire or select a higher speed and start over.

The cast of characters in OW is well-balanced; there aren't so many bad guys that you feel hopelessly overwhelmed. And, getting ahead isn't too easy. You feel like you gain points the old fashioned way ... you EARN them.

At the beginning of each game you get three Drill Bits which last about a minute and half each. The drill bit and pipe retraction is, perhaps, the most amusing feature of the game. By just slightly touching the trigger button you can partially retract them. This maneuver allows you to get out of danger's way in a hurry while staying deep within the underground maze.

While clearing screens you rack-up ten points for each Oil Pellet you munch and 1000 points for each super-charged deposit called a Goblet. This makes the Goblets important since every 10,000 points you get an extra drill bit. Another element on your side is the Petromin, a sort of power pellet located deep within each maze that slows down the Oozies for a few seconds and allows you to gobble up deeply buried Oil Pellets.

The bad buys in this game prey on your two weak spots: your pipe and your drill bit. The Land Mines detonate when your Drill Bit touches them; though they pass right over your pipe without damage. The Oozies work just the opposite of the Land Mines, destroying your pipe just by touching it while your Drill Bit can munch them right down (and get 20 to 170 points each for doing it.)

Oil's Well is a very good game. But for a few minor flaws it might have been a great game. OW lacks a few of the standard features that many hard-core home arcaders have come to expect; high score save to disk and two-player competition mode. Also, the underground creatures

Continued on p. 46

CHAOS MANOR

by Jerry Pournelle
Byte, July '84

ends in a year, such as 5/16/84, then it will be printed only in that year; if only a month and day are given, it prints the notice for every year. (Years can range between 1583 and 9999; if only two digits are given, the twentieth century is presumed.)

"Calendar files can be separated or combined: you can have a file of birthdays and another of meetings, print a calendar for each, and combine those with others to make one master calendar. Calendar/1 comes with a number of prewritten calendar files, including holidays and historical dates of interest.

"Calendars can be printed on screen or the printer. You specify the length and width. If a notice won't fit, what will fit is printed, an asterisk is added, and the balance is printed as a note on an overflow page. The layout's good considering the space you have to work with.

"There are a number of other control features, all well documented.

"Calendar/1 is useful for scheduling work; many people can be given identical copies for job control; it is also useful for travel scheduling."

We expect to make a lot of use of Calendar/1 here at Chaos Manor. It's a well-conceived and useful program.

OUT OF SPACE AGAIN . . .

There's a ton of stuff on my list, and I'm out of space. At least let me mention the Infocom games, such as Sorcerer and Enchanter and the like. Not only do we at Chaos Manor love them, but I notice that my partner Larry Niven is hooked. For those few who don't know, Infocom games are script driven: there's no fancy graphics, no arcade action; only text adventures.

This kind of game grew out of the original Crowther and Woods Adventure of the Colossal Cave. The original Infocom implementers worked on Zork while at MIT; they later developed other software for role-playing games. Some of the work they've done parsing and interpreting English is remarkable.

Enough. My taxes are due, after which I'm on the road for two weeks; meanwhile, I just opened a letter from Judy-Lynne Del Rey, my long-suffering editor

Ballantine Books; she's expecting Larry and me to turn in *Footfall Right Away*: the letter said only, "Nag! Nag! Nag!"

I think that was a hint. ■

SOFTWARE REVIEWS

Stickybear Opposites comes in a folder with a sheet of six large stickers, a poster illustrating some of the opposites, a small booklet of instructions and hints for parents, and a hardbound children's book of more opposites not included in the program. It will run on any Apple II Plus (48K) with DOS 3.3 or on the //e or Apple III. The disk is protected and comes with a 90-day limited warranty, after which time-damaged disks will be replaced for \$10. It is manufactured by Weekly Reader Family Software, a division of Xerox Education Publications, 245 Long Hill Road, Middletown, CT 06457, and lists for \$39.95. ■

Mike Seeds
Lancaster, PA

Planetfall

Welcome aboard the Stellar Patrol Ship Feinstein. You begin your mission as a lowly Ensign Seventh Class scrubbing the filthy metal deck of this monstrous ship. Watch out for dreaded Ensign First Class Blather, the bane of your shipboard existence, who appears at any time to make life miserable by giving you demerits for leaving your assigned job on deck nine. Worse than that is winding up in the brig for disobeying his orders.

An alien ambassador, Br'gun-Te 'Elkner-ig'nun from the planet Blow'k-Bibben-Gordo is also on board. Much to your dismay, he leaves a trail of green slime everywhere he goes. Of course, he always promenades just where you finished cleaning.

Suddenly, there's an explosion! I hope you remember where the primary escape pods are, because they're the only way to get off the ship and continue Planetfall. Upon landing your escape pod, you'll find yourself in a wondrous land, somewhat reminiscent of Zork but with a touch of Starcross.

One of the first things you'll have to decipher is a plaque. The language is strange because it's written in a corrupt form of Galalingua. Learn this language quickly because

it's used all over the countryside.

Now for the joy of this adventure. He stands four feet tall and his name is B-19-7, but his friends call him Floyd. Floyd is a robot who follows you around. Best of all he talks so you won't get lonely while exploring. Floyd can be a pest at times, though. He loves to play Hucka-Bucka and Hider-Seeker. Don't get mad, because Floyd would give his life for you.

Enjoy exploring this lost civilization while you learn about its past. There are shuttles and elevators to take you around on your journey. Food and drink are the only things to worry about for a while. What to eat is obvious, but what to drink may pose more of a problem. Sleeping is necessary, but you can't curl up just anywhere. You will awaken when fully rested and not a millichron sooner.

Time is measured in the millichrons of current Galactic Standard Time. Read the documentation to understand millichrons. You only need 80 points to win, but they're a tough 80.

Planetfall sells for \$49.95, and can be played on either the Apple II, Apple II Plus (or Apple III in Apple II emulation mode). Also needed are 32K of RAM and a 16-sector disk drive. A printer is optional, but with one you can make a transcript of the adventure as you play. Planetfall is from Infocom, Inc., 55 Wheeler Street, Cambridge, MA 02138. ■

Linda Beaulieu
Ansonia, CT

The Coveted Mirror

Magic mirrors can tell you who's the fairest in the land, take you beyond the looking glass or, as in Penguin's *The Coveted Mirror*, see your misdeeds and immediately punish you. Such a mirror can be a powerful tool in benevolent hands, but in the grasp of an evil man, like the sinister King Voar, it could subjugate a kingdom.

King Voar, in seizing the mirror from a wizard, blundered and broke the glass into five pieces. He was able

REVIEWS

functions, including shadow print and variable pitch. About all this word-processing program lacks is a "mouse," a movable desktop device for controlling the on-screen cursor.

In order to acquire this very handy feature, you'll either have to buy a special computer like the Macintosh or special software like **Microsoft Word** (from Microsoft). This program (\$475, includ-



Techwriter: word processing for mathematicians.

ing the mouse for the IBM PC) offers a good range of word-processing features, including "windows" which allows you to view and work on several documents at a time. But the real reason for buying it is the mouse.

Some people object to taking a hand off the keyboard, but until you've used one of these electronic rodents, there's no way to describe how much it really does speed up the editing of a manuscript. It's probably worth struggling through the gibberish that passes for a manual, and the complex formatting operations of this particular program.

One prime example of the trend towards specialized word-processing programs is the addition of graphics—the ability to add pictures and diagrams to your manuscript—along with varied fonts, or typefaces. Softcraft Inc.'s **Fancy Font** (\$180 for any computer using the CP/M or MS-DOS operating system) is technically not a word processor. It is a typesetting program used *with* a word-processing program. As such, it allows you not only to print your writing out in over 30 different font styles and sizes—from sans-serif to Old English—but even to create your own typefaces, using a data base of over 1,500 characters. You can print out in Cyrillic or, I suppose,

even Sanskrit. There are mathematical notations, sub- and superscripts, and Greek letters for scientific writing. The notations, however, are limited to a maximum size of one square inch, which means that a complex integral number cannot be displayed.

For on-line calculus, what you need is Computer Mart Inc.'s **TechWriter** (\$795—including the requisite Big Blue expansion board—for the IBM PC, Sequent Chameleon, North Star and Visual 1050). Here's a word-processing program that can handle anyone's mathematical-display needs. To form the integral sign, for example, you merely hit the glossary key and then the Z key. A prompt asks how many lines tall you wish the sign to be. Enter the appropriate number, press the confirm key and the computer will draw just what you've ordered. Then you can move the integral into the desired position in the manuscript. The software includes some 200 characters and symbols—from summation signs to brackets and braces. It is also able to produce a table of contents and indexes automatically.

If those functions seem to lie on the shadowy borders of word processing, consider Living Videotext Inc.'s **Think-Tank**. The original "idea processor," Think Tank (\$195 for the IBM PC and compatibles, \$150 for the Apple II series) has as its primary purpose the systematizing of its user's thoughts. Its word-processing capabilities are very limited, for it is designed mainly to search for and sort notes into an outline form, to aid you in organizing your thoughts. Like the mouse for moving an on-screen cursor, outlining by computer (or outlining at all) is something you will find either terrific or useless. And the only way to find out is to try out the software.

Erik Sandberg-Diment

ADULTS ONLY

Games for grownups, from flight simulation to the chance to go one-on-one against Dr. J.

THE BIRTH OF A NOTION: COMPUTER games as an art form. It is a subject of speculation wherever software buffs gather these days. "Silicon Valley," the observation goes, "is just like Hollywood in 1910." And indeed, at least one parallel between early films

and early computer games is striking: both imitated an earlier form of entertainment. The first narrative movies were simply filmed stage plays—the notion of actually moving the camera was a subsequent breakthrough. Similarly, early computer games aped their immediate predecessors—mechanical arcade-games such as pinball machines or shooting galleries—by emphasizing hand-eye coordination, with endless variations on spaceships and apes.

Computer games have now reached a turning point. With the market for old-style action arcade-games oversaturated, game programmers have realized that a potentially vast adult-audience exists—if only computer games can reach the level of maturity and enrichment that the movies did. This is where the notion of computer games as art form arises: computer entertainment that will someday be discussed at dinner parties the same way novels are today. It remains unclear, however, in which directions the game medium will evolve. Two recent games reflect how diverse the evolution already is.

Infocom, a Massachusetts-based software publisher, has won a string of industry awards for what is called "interactive fiction"—text-only adventure games that some critics have likened to computerized novels. Novels these aren't, but a recent Infocom prose-adventure called **Planetfall**, (\$49.95 for the IBM PC, Apple II, Commodore 64 and TRS-80), written by Steve Meretzky, is a good example of both the strengths and weaknesses of the approach.

In **Planetfall**, the player takes the part of a lowly ensign in an ill-fated Stellar Patrol ship; when the ship is destroyed, you're left stranded on a strange planet filled with the abandoned edifices and machines of an earlier culture. Sooner or later, depending on your dexterity at the game, you meet a talking robot named Floyd; Floyd becomes your companion, and also provides a bit of comic relief. Your mission—with Floyd's somewhat unpredictable assistance—is to survive, and to repair some of the damaged machinery on the planet. Initially, survival depends on finding food and sleep; along the way, additional threats appear, including some villainous mutants and nasty little creatures that chew on you while you sleep. By the end of the game, you and the program will have combined to "write" a complete adventure tale.

The program's "prose" is adequate, although its main purpose is to convey

REVIEWS

information. The player communicates by typing in commands such as "Go north," or "Get survival kit." The game then responds with, for example, a description of the room into which the player's move has taken him ("This is a very long room lined with multitiered bunks. Flimsy partitions between the tiers may have provided a modicum of privacy. These spartan living quarters could have once housed many hundreds, but now seem quite deserted."). Infocom is renowned for the sophistication of its "parser"—the software that recognizes what the player is saying—and compared to more primitive adventure-games, Planetfall "understands" a fairly wide set of commands. Until you get the accepted vocabulary down, however, you are still likely to draw some blanks from the game, politely phrased as "I beg your pardon?"

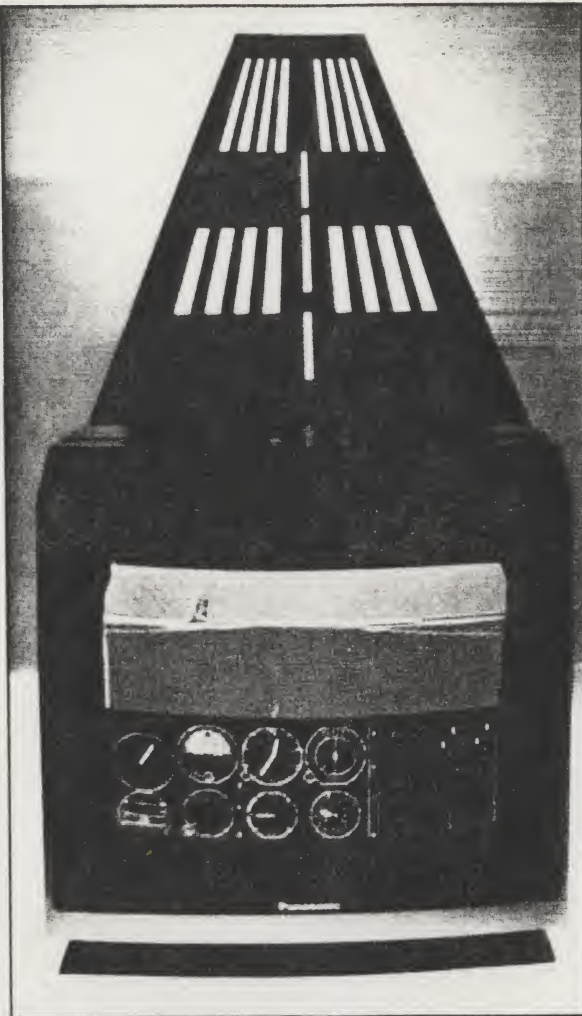
Planetfall will take even skilled players many hours to complete—in computer adventure-games, you spend a lot of time backtracking, losing your place, encountering blind alleys. Because the game ranges over a large number of locales, it's necessary to draw a map—actually, a number of maps—as you go along. At any point, with a misstep, your character can die, ending the game and putting you right back at the first scene. (For this reason, seasoned players use a second diskette to "save" their progress



Planetfall: lowly ensigns on an ill-fated ship.

during the game. Should you "die," this allows you to start again without going all the way back to the beginning.)

There are probably a large number of half-completed Infocom games out in



Flight simulator II: an all-too-vivid CRASH!

the world—not because they're uninteresting, but because finishing one is a major investment of time and requires a special dedication to puzzle-solving. This is where the parallel with prose fiction breaks down: millions of people spend nearly as many hours reading, say, a novel by James Michener, or a stack of P.D. James's mysteries. Relatively few of them would be likely to make a similar investment of time in a recreation like Planetfall. The difference is that conventional fiction offers pleasure simply in the reading itself, and is at best the product of inspiration. The text of an Infocom prose-adventure, on the other hand, is necessarily functional: it is the engine of the plot. It is not, ultimately, intended to be entertainment in itself.

Anyone, however, interested in the cultural impact of computers would be well advised to venture into at least one Infocom production. Before long, the storyteller's art will probably be supplemented by computer—as an aid in plotting, for example—and Infocom's authors are on the cutting edge of the exploration. And Planetfall may offer at least one clue toward a fruitful direction. The robot Floyd is an appealing enough character to make some players return to the game simply to find out what happens to him. That a robot

would carry the day in computerized fiction somehow seems entirely apt.

WHILE HUNDREDS OF ACTION OR "ARCADE" games have been written for personal computers, most fall into a mere handful of categories—maze games, climbing games, shooting games and so on. Genuinely original ideas are rare and usually spawn dozens of copies. Electronic Arts' **One-on-One** (\$40, available for the Apple II series, and the Commodore 64, with Atari due out in June) is an original—but may prove more difficult to ape than most. To simulate an actual one-on-one game of basketball, programmer Eric Hammond sat down with Boston Celtics star Larry Bird and the great Julius Erving (Dr. J) of the Philadelphia 76ers, and recorded their shooting percentages under various conditions, as well as their individual brands of strategy and maneuvering.

One-on-One essentially recreates the playing styles of the two stars on-screen, with excellent, fast-moving color graphics modeled after game films. The on-screen Dr. J. is quicker to get to the basket and, close in, his moves are fancier—a bit of flashy playground footwork. Bird, on the other hand, seems more reserved, but is a better rebounder, and has a cool and very accurate outside shot.

The player controls the actual movements of the figures, using a joystick. The player can choose one character and play against the computer (which will play the other star), or else two players can compete directly against each other. (The manual includes instructions for using two joysticks with an Apple.) One-on-One has been written with considerable attention to detail, including such functions as fouls, hot and cold shooting spells and—when a player has made a particularly notable shot—an instant replay.

The result is a fast, engrossing game that seems far more textured and human than most examples of the arcade-action genre—suggesting that even in the fairly mechanistic world of arcade games there is room for creativity. An earlier Electronics Arts game called "Pinball Construction Set" sold an entire Apple computer system to at least one pinball fan with no previous interest in computers whatsoever. One-on-One seems a good bet to do the same for basketball fans.

BESIDES CREATING FANTASY, THE OTHER entertainment task at which computers excel is the simulation of reality. Flight

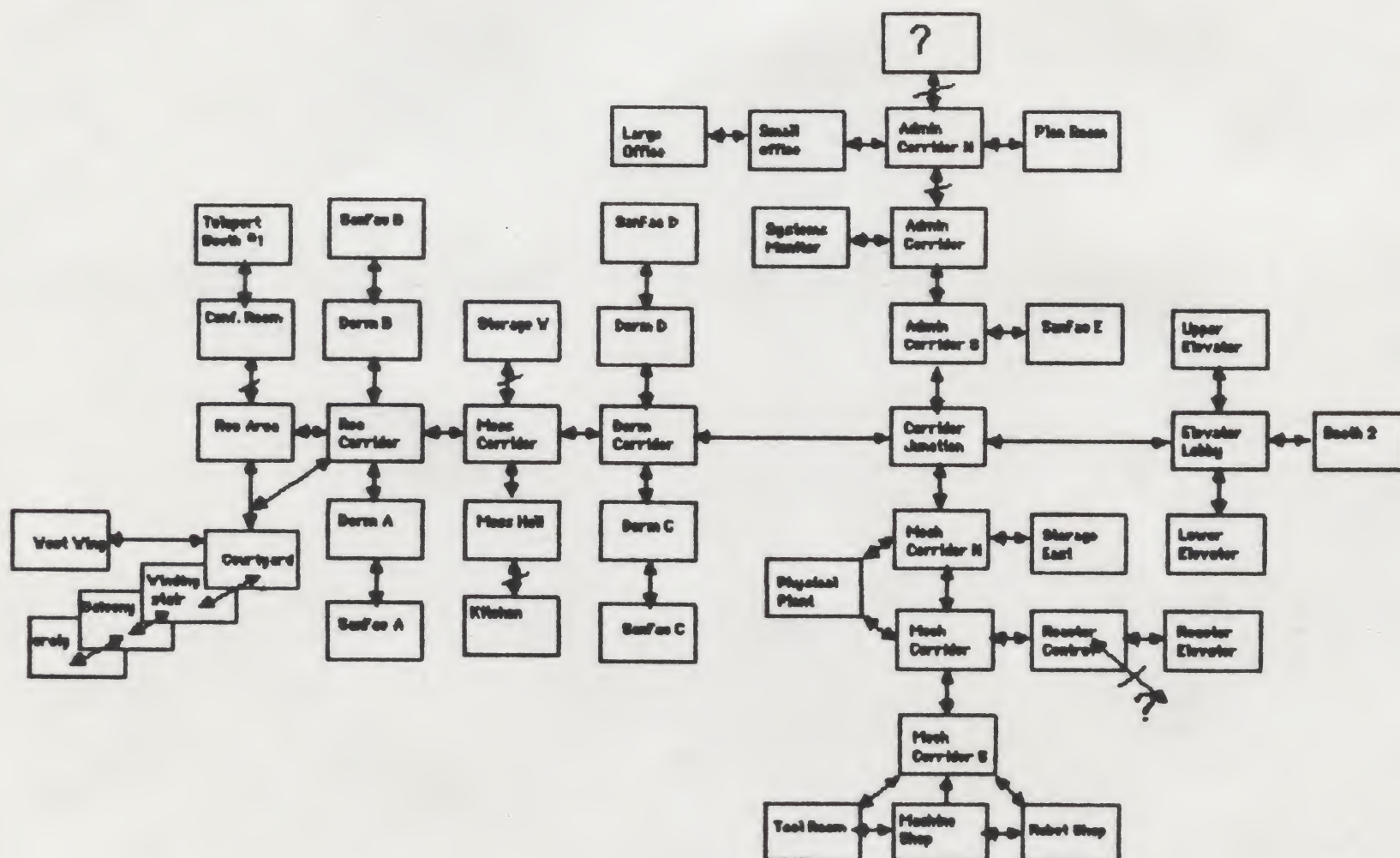
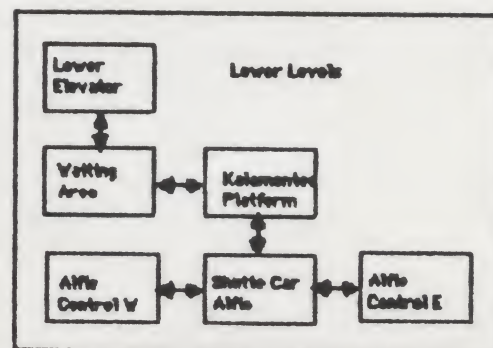
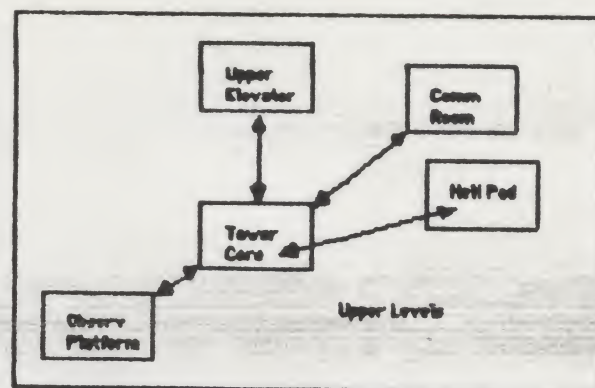
my map on MacDraw as I played, this has the advantages of:

- Instant access to the map, no more searching around the desk.
- When a new room is discovered and you can't fit it onto your map, you simply move the rooms around on the map to allow room for the new area (on MacDraw).
- When you are finished with the adventure you have a nice well done map to keep for future reference when friends ask you for hints.

MacDraw works far better at this than MacPaint, figure 1 is the map I made while playing Planetfall.

While the advanced adventure player will find this game at most a pleasant diversion, the beginning to intermediate player will find it challenging. The hard puzzles are few and far between in this adventure, but it was so much fun that I look forward to the promised sequel.

JIM HOPPER

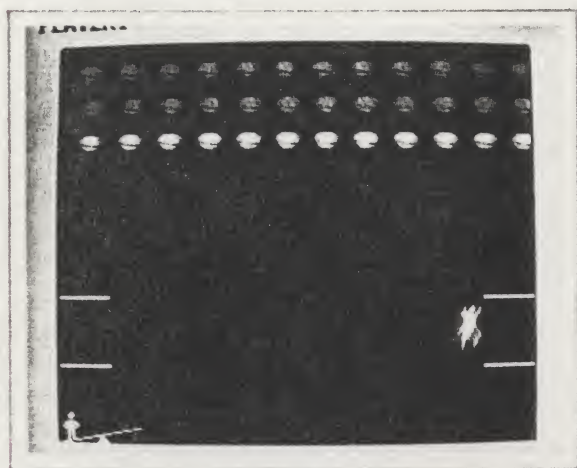


CLOWNS

Commodore/C-64/cartridge

Hurray! There's finally a game that uses paddles! **Clowns** can be played by one or two people, and the paddle plugs into the C-64 game port one.

At the top of the screen is a continual stream of blue, green and yellow balloons. The yellows, at the lowest level, are worth 20 points each; the greens count for 50 points, and the blues at the very top of the screen score 100 points apiece. Clearing all of the yellows earns 200 bonus points,



Clowns uses a paddle for game-play.

eliminating all of the greens awards a 500-point bonus, and clearing the blues means an extra 1,000-points plus an extra jumper.

The game strategy is to propel the jumpers via a seesaw by skillfully positioning it so that the landing clown bounces his partner as high as possible to burst the balloons overhead. Each bounce is worth 10 points. Additionally, the game can be played by either one or two players.

Clowns is a home version of the Bally/Midway arcade classic, and the graphics, sound, animation and play action are all superb, virtually on a par with the original.

The game depends entirely on timing and judgement, and a good working knowledge of geometric deflection patterns is a definite plus. Though it can be quite challenging, it's definitely a game that the whole family will be able to enjoy.

(Tom Benford)

OIL'S WELL

Sierra On-Line/Atari/32K disk

Oil's Well takes players to an oil-rich drilling site practically dripping with black gold ready for the taking. All the gamer has to do is touch the oil pellets with the drill bit to pump the precious stuff to the surface. The only problem is that maverick oil barons, jealous of the fortune, have planted

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land mines and evil, lurking Oozies in the field to work their mischief. If the Oozies touch the pipeline, they eat right through its metal casing, and it's back to step one to try again.

There's only one way to eliminate an Oozie, and that's to gulp it down in the drill bit. But the roaming land mines are a different story — while they can't harm the pipeline itself, one touch destroys the drill bit completely.

The best — and most innovative — part of the game is the player's option

to retract the pipeline with a press of the joystick's action button. Since the drill bit can't reverse its direction once it establishes a pipeline, retracting the line is the easiest, and best way to deal with approaching Oozies — or just to change direction. The pipeline can be shortened a little (press the button quickly) or a lot (a longer press), depending on the situation at hand.

Munching a petromin slows down the enemies, while gulping a goblet is worth plenty of points. Eight different levels, as well as three skill settings, make this a challenge to any home arcader.

(Tracie Forman)

PASSPORT TO ADVENTURE

PLANETFALL

Infocom/Most Computers/48K disk

Swabbing the decks of the S.P.S. *Feinstein* is routine work. (When you joined the Stellar Patrol, you knew you'd have to clean up your act!) The bane of your existence, Ensign Blather, is breathing down your neck as usual. . but the next thing you know, you're the sole survivor of a shipwreck in space, hurtling toward an unknown planet in a tiny escape pod.

That's the opening sequence of **Planetfall**. Infocom's science fiction text adventure is energized by a definite sense of humor, and its packaging lives up to Infocom's excellent reputation. The game comes complete with a plastic Stellar Patrol I.D. badge, three

interplanetary post cards, an incomplete letter to the folks at home, and a witty, easy-to-read instruction manual entitled "Today's Stellar Patrol: Boldly going where angels fear to tread."

As in all of Infocom's text adventures, the computer understands a wide vocabulary of complex commands instead of the usual two-word entry. For example, instead of typing in "Go door," players can try "Examine the door, then give the book to Floyd" and be understood.

The game begins with a routine day aboard the S.P.S. *Feinstein*, progressing automatically to the inevitable blow-up. Figuring out how to escape the disaster is easy enough — it practically hits the player over the head.



Planetfall takes the player on a one-way trip to a shipwreck in space!

However, because the escape pod is fully automated, there isn't an awful lot to do for a number of turns, and it would have been nice if all that wonderful description of the scenery in space ran without offering so many prompts.

Once on the planet, the gamer must face a number of challenges. The most pressing is to explore the deserted city for food, water, and a safe place to bed down for the night (a new concept in adventure gaming). Eventually, the shipwrecked spacefarer meets Floyd, a playful, childlike robot with a sensitive soul. Together, they have to devise a way to save the planet from certain doom — and signal for help — to win the game.

This tongue-in-cheek brain-teaser is one more excellent addition to Infocom's terrific product line. Be warned that there are a few challenges that seem nearly impossible — like figuring out a number between zero and 1000 that opens a locked door — but with patience, players are likely to stumble on the answer (no, you *don't* have to dial each and every number).

Planetfall is difficult, but not impossible, taxing but not too frustrating, and Floyd has a way of growing on you.

(Tracie Forman)

GATEWAY TO APSHAI

Epyx/Atari & C-64/cartridge

Gateway to Apshai is a solid contrast to many of Epyx's older action/adventure games. For one thing, the company has finally eliminated the need to boot the game with a BASIC

COMPUTER GAMING

cartridge in the slot, which generally results in choppy, frustratingly slow action. For another, *Gateway to Apshai* is available on cartridge, a welcome boon to would-be adventurers who have yet to add a disk drive to the computer collection.

This is unquestionably one of the finest action/adventure games on the market today, and is definitely the top choice among the cartridge games. *Gateway to Apshai* packs more punch than many games on disk. This action-oriented dungeon exploration game features 16 different eight-level dungeons. More than 7500 different areas await the stouthearted, and the player can even mix and match dungeons — and levels — during the course of each game. It all adds up to more variety than you can shake a joystick at.

The gamer uses a joystick to control an on-screen hero (seen from a bird's-eye view) as he makes his way through a multidirectional scrolling playfield. Each section of the dungeon is only made visible *after* it's been entered.

Each dungeon chamber might contain chests crammed full of riches, weapons and/or armor, spell scrolls, locked or secret doors, traps... and, of course, monsters. On the first level, they're your basic sewer vermin — large bats, sewer rats, and garter snakes, for the most part. Subsequent levels are a bit harder to survive in, with the likes of trolls, evil wizards, and

zombies strategically placed to make life miserable.

With the help of the option, select, and start keys on the Atari, gamers unlock doors, cast spells from scrolls, pick up bounty, check on their status and weapons, search out secret passageways, and brandish their swords (or bows and arrows) at villains.

Players start the game with five lives, plus strength, agility, luck, and health scores. The former three statistics influence the hero's fighting (or fleeing) ability, while health is affected by wounds suffered during the course of play. When health reaches zero, the character dies. After finishing each level or choosing to go on to the next, bonus points may be added to the player's strength, agility, or luck, and health points always increase as well.

As the levels increase in difficulty, treasures get better. Adventurers are advised to explore thoroughly, because better armor and weapons are scattered around to help gamers face even greater dangers. Bows, arrows, chain mail and healing potions are just a few of the pickings for sharp-eyed swordsmen.

Gateway to Apshai deserves the highest recommendation. With its fast action "real time" fights, attractive graphics, variety of pace, and emphasis on both brains and brawn, this is one of the best bets on the block for any action/adventure fan.

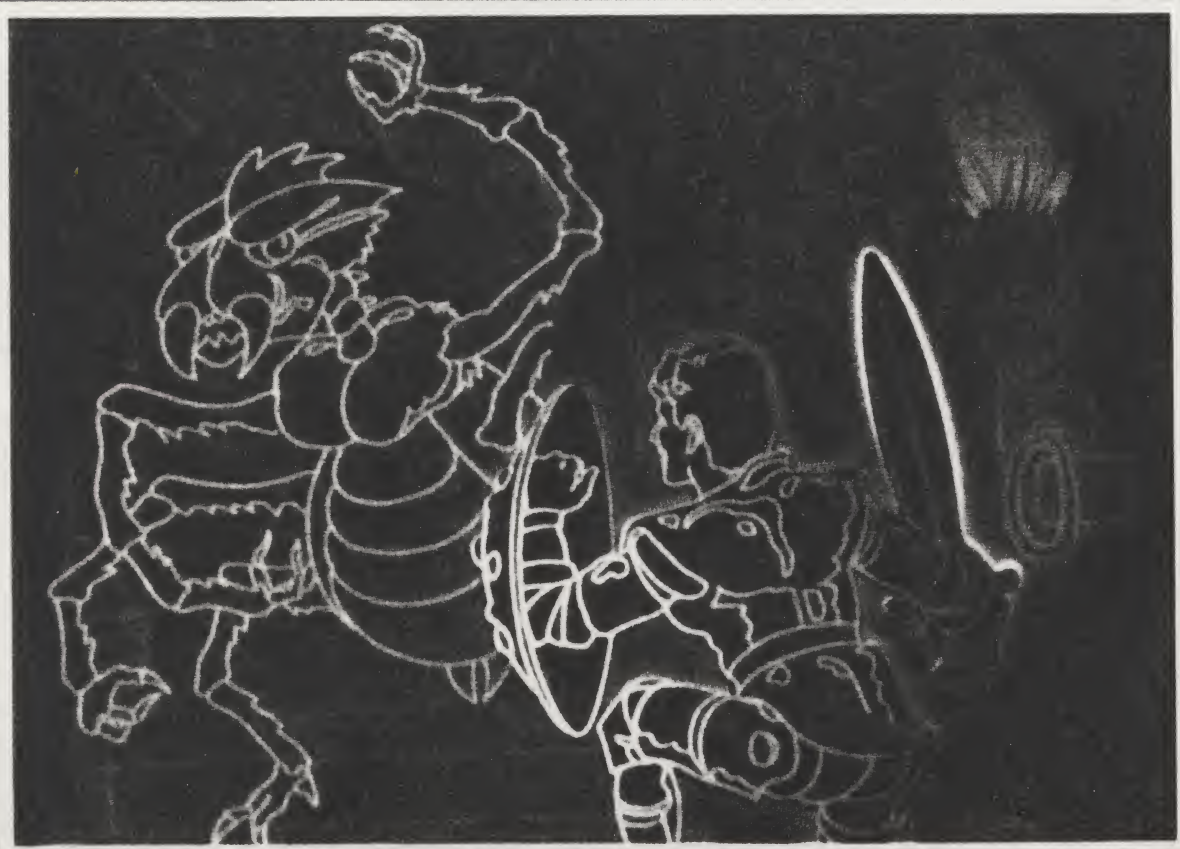
(Tracie Forman)

ENCHANTER

Infocom/Most computers/48K disk

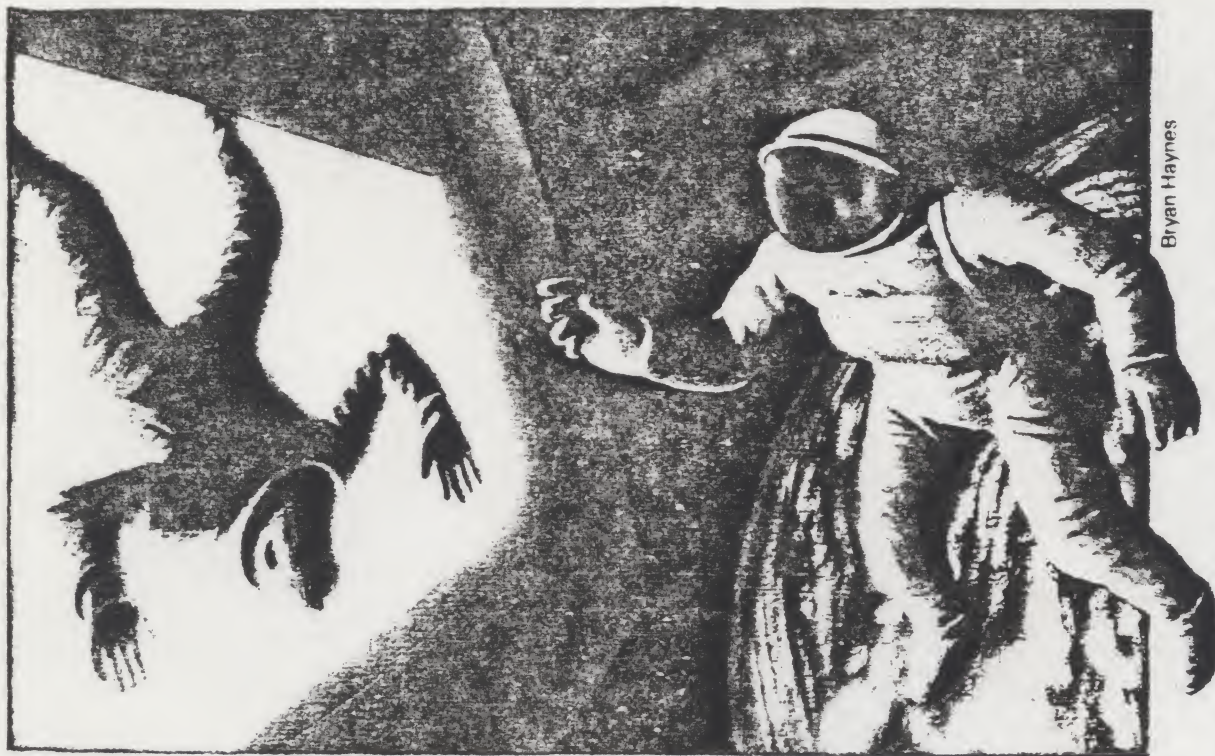
Enchanter begins the second sword-and-sorcery trilogy from Infocom, the company whose name is synonymous with high-quality text adventures. Unofficially dubbed "Zork IV," *Enchanter* owes a lot to its legendary predecessor, both in authorship (*Zork* creators Marc Blank and Dave Lebling collaborated on this effort) and in genre (the full-text fantasy uses the Interlogic prose, making the computer capable of understanding complex commands).

But *Enchanter* sports some interesting twists on the old puzzle-solving theme. For one thing, food, water, and rest are required for any magician's acolyte who hopes to stay alive, a concept pioneered in Infocom's *Planetfall*. Also, there are far fewer objects just lying there to be used. Instead, the majority of treasures are actually scrolls containing powerful spells, which must be cast appropriately.



Adventurers face unspeakable horrors in *Gateway to Apshai*.

Science Fiction: The Search For Sales



Bryan Haynes

By Richard Paul Zucker

1 0:15 p.m. You're standing on an arid, barren planetoid, devoid of all life forms except for rocks and boulders of every kind. There are millions of rocks and boulders. Nothing else. The light from three suns sears your eyes. One of those granite shapes is the outlaw chameleon you've been chasing for a decade. You stagger, a little dizzy from exhaustion. You rub your face, hardly aware of the week's stubble. Frustration again. At this point you're too tired to go on. You move slowly back to your starship, feel every tired muscle and joint as you climb in. You'll leave . . . pick up the trail another day, another time. 10:35 p.m.

Scene from a new science fiction movie? Television series? Novel? Magazine article?

Try an explosive new medium—interactive computer science fiction/adventure games.

It's been reported that George Lucas shopped every major movie studio with *Star Wars*. Interest was minimal and they all turned him down except for one—Twentieth-

Century Fox. The rest is history . . . and mega-profits.

In the last half-dozen years or so some of the biggest-grossing movies of all time have had science fiction and/or fantasy/adventure themes. *E.T.* *Star Wars*. *The Empire Strikes Back*. *Return Of The Jedi*. *Alien*. *Raiders Of The Lost Ark*. *Blade Runner*. *Road Warrior*. *Indiana Jones And The Temple Of Doom*. *Gremlins*. *Star Trek II: The Wrath Of Khan*. *Star Trek III: The Search For Spock*.

And although the coin-operated arcade business has seen its day, it might be easy to forget that many of the most popular titles were, and in some cases continue to be, science fiction in theme, although of the shoot-em-up variety. *Zaxxon*. *Galaga*. *Space Invaders*. *Gorf*. *Galaxian*. *Asteroids*. *Defender*.

Science fiction popular

Good science-fiction sells—ask any movie studio executive now. Ask book publishers and book sellers if science fiction isn't a strong category. Remember the enormous

success of Robert Heinlein's *Stranger In A Strange Land*? And what about Frank Herbert's *Dune*, which, incidentally, is being translated into a major film with Sting, of the rock group Police, as the star. Like mystery buffs, science fiction novel readers have an almost cult-like devotion.

Science fiction is also developing into a strong recreational software category for the software dealer. This type of program, while popular to a degree in previous incarnations, is undergoing exciting maturation into a major software sales category.

Just about every recreational software supplier has at least some science fiction titles in its repertoire: Examples include SSI's *Galactic Gladiators* and *Cytron Master*; Electronic Arts' *The Last Gladiator*; Muse's *Titan Empire*; Sierra's and Origin's *Ultima* product; First Star's *Astro Chase*; Micro Fun's *Dino Eggs*; Activision's *Beamrider*; and Synapse's *Dimension X*. And that's just naming a few. Even

Infocom, masters of the prose text adventure game, have several best selling science fiction titles including *Planetfall* and *Suspended*.

Filmmakers are getting into the act as evidenced by the new Atari/Lucasfilm titles *Rescue On Fractalus!* and *Ballblazer*, which utilize some eye-catching, three-dimensional effects. Atari, of course, starting with its initial 2600 dedicated video game console, always had a fair number of science fiction-oriented games in its catalog. Although offered initially for the new Atari 7800 Prosystem advanced video game console, these newer games will be converted to other home computer formats.

And although it's only in the very early stages of discussion, movie studios and entertainment software companies are already considering joint ventures. Some of the

best-selling science fiction computer software titles lend themselves to perfect movie translations. Fantasize for a moment.

"Coming soon to a theatre near you . . . *Planetfall*, *Temple Of Apshai*, *Choplifter*, *Questron*." It may not be as far-fetched as you think when 1986/87 rolls around.

Computer science fiction seems to fall into two major categories. First is the planet landing simulation type, with a first-person perspective that may or may not have varying degrees of shoot-em-up action. A number of those are also educational in nature, like Peachtree's *Tranquility Base*. The second category takes a more cerebral role playing/fantasy/journey approach. And science fiction software also seems more likely to break first ground with new technology, i.e., state-of-the-art graphics and sound.

Market trend awareness

Software dealers, again, have to be made aware of the recent strides this category of gaming has taken and convey that excitement to the consumer. Again, it's no longer merely shoot-em-ups. The dealer should also be aware that a lot of their computer-owning customers, teenage and adult, already have a fondness for the science fiction medium, either through books or movies. It's almost a natural sell.

Perhaps the most dramatic recent statement about the potential of science fiction-oriented software was the debut of the Trillium series of interactive adventure games which derive their inspiration from the novels of best-selling science fiction authors.

Initial titles from Trillium, part of Spinnaker, include: *Rendezvous With Rama*, based on the book by Arthur C. Clarke; *Amazon*, by Michael Crichton; *Dragonworld*, based on the book by Byron Preiss and Michael Reaves; *Starman Jones*, from the book by Robert Heinlein; *Fahrenheit 451*, based on the book by Ray Bradbury; and *Shadowkeep*, from which a book has been adapted by Alan Dean Foster.

The premise of these interactive computer adventure games is that the player(s) assume the role or identity of the characters in order to be able to embark on adventures and explore environments. The scripts are "professional" and are combined with "ahead-of-the-art" high-resolution color graphics, according to Seth Godin, Trillium product manager. The programs, he adds, understand hundreds of words so that players can communicate with the computer in English. The games' complexity and levels of challenge translate into upward of 40 hours of game play.

Godin also points out that these plot-based games also have graphic clues and hints that make

Software dealers, again, have to be made aware of the recent strides this category of gaming has taken and convey that excitement to the consumer.

them somewhat easier to play than many of the adventure games currently on the market. Another bonus: some of the programs actually contain fast-paced, arcade-styled games within the adventure games.

Godin believes "science fiction plots naturally lend themselves to the computer adventure game concept. And by developing games by authors and books that already have a following, there is an audience already built in. Our research has also shown us that there is a high correlation between science fiction enthusiasts and computer owners."

Indeed, Spinnaker, didn't develop its Trillium science fiction and fantasy adventure game division on a whim. Two years ago Spinnaker entered the educational software market, believing there was a marketing niche for a certain style of software in that category and combined that with a marketing-driven approach that has earned it a consistent top spot in that field. The firm maintains that it went from \$1-million in sales in 1982 to more than

\$11-million for 1983. Projections call for \$50-million by the end of 1984.

And just as Spinnaker eyed a need in the educational field, their research has indicated—and this goes against the prevailing thought by some industry observers—that the market for computer adventure games, particularly those with a science fiction hook and tied into major established authors, could be a very promising sales and growth category. "But," expresses Godwin, "they have to offer intellectual stimulation and creativity."

Entertainment growing

Spinnaker cites recent Future Computing figures which indicate

that entertainment is now the primary use of the ever-increasing installed-base of home computers. Entertainment software is predicted to remain the biggest retail seller with 4.5-billion in retail sales estimated for 1987, compared to 1983 sales of \$600-million. Another study, this one by Paine, Webber, Mitchell, Hutchins, Inc., indicates that entertainment software will grow from \$420 million in 1983 to \$715 million in 1984.

Furthermore, Spinnaker research also estimates that adventure games will take 30 percent of the market by the end of 1984. A huge proportion of the top entertainment software best-sellers is made up of adventure/strategy or fantasy/role-playing games. These types of games usually enjoy a long product cycle and life and attract under 30, male, science-fiction or fantasy literature enthusiasts who also go to science fiction cinema.

Godin is also quick to point out an author like Arthur C. Clarke has more than 20 million of his books in print, including *2001: A Space Odyssey*. Robert Heinlein has written

more than 40 novels. Michael Crichton has had five of his books turned into films, notably *The Andromeda Strain*. And Ray Bradbury has been penning science fiction novels since 1939. Four of his more than 300 stories have been made into movies, such as *The Martian Chronicles*, and his work has appeared in more than 800 anthologies.

Epyx, no stranger to strategy/fantasy/adventure games with such classics as *Temple Of Apshai*, has already marketed several science fiction-oriented games and, in fact, has had *Dragonriders Of Pern*, based upon Anne McCaffrey's award winning science fiction novel of the same name, available for some time.

A sequel is forthcoming in *Moreta: Dragonlady Of Pern*, a game in which the player assumes the role of Moreta, searching for the secret remedy to a mysterious ill-

ness plaguing the inhabitants of the planet of Pern.

Epyx is also shipping its first all-prose home computer adventure game. Called *Robots Of Dawn*, it is based on the successful novel by Isaac Asimov.

Microcomputer Games, a division of The Avalon Hill Game Company, Baltimore, has a new science fiction offering, *Jupiter Mission 1999*, Scott Lamb's interactive space fantasy adventure game that includes challenging arcade segments and mystifying puzzles. The package comes with four separate disks.

Says Phyllis Suddeth, Microcomputer Games: "I think their appeal today is very much tied into what's been going in with movies in the last few years. People have always been attracted by science fiction and the thought of exploring unknown places. It's vicarious." The company has another game of that

type in its catalog called *Free Trader* that's described as a science fiction/adventure/strategy game. It's a simulation of freelance commerce, where the player has to make decisions as to what commodities to buy. The firm will also release *Quest Of The Space Beagle*, the sequel to *Jupiter Mission 1999*.

Jon Loveless, vice president of Synapse, believes the future of entertainment software lies with "electronic novels" and that's where his company is headed. Synapse, a veteran entertainment software firm with a range of titles from the older *Survivor*, *Fort Apocalypse*, *The Pharaoh's Curse*, *Shamus*, *Protector II* and others, to the newer *Dimension X*, *Enchanter*, *Rainbow Walker*, *Slam Ball* and the Commodore 64 version of *Zaxxon*, will be introducing two new electronic novels shortly, called *Mindwheels* and *Essex*, both with science fiction themes.

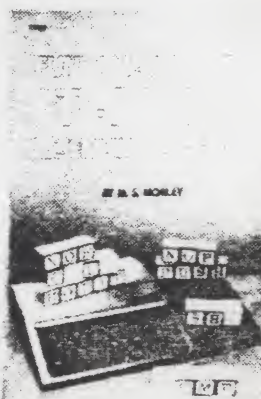
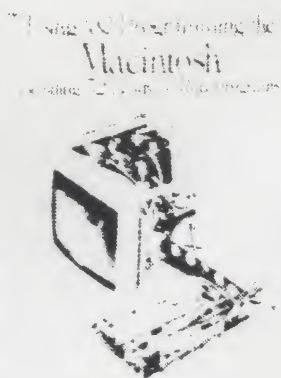
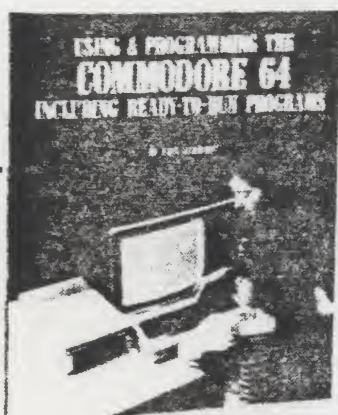
They will be designed like a book in that the user will read a few chapters, get introduced to the characters, the plot and a few scenarios and then move directly to the diskette. There will be no graphics on the disk, just text.

"While we have had a number of science fiction titles in our catalog," he reasons, "we have never pigeon-holed them as strictly science fiction. That's too limiting."

"The next big trend in entertainment software is the electronic novel approach. Infocom has already proven how successful that direction can be. Everyone's saying, dealer and customer alike, that they want more complex games. They don't have to be science fiction, though. The next wave of games can be mystery, whodunit types as well. The electronic novel lends itself to that type of program as well."

Text trend

"And since we hope to be putting out these games on just about all the major home computer formats, there won't be any graphics. The graphics, particularly on the lower-end machines, take up too much



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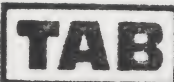
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memory. I know some other companies are combining text and graphics in their approach but that is really straddling the fence by appealing to adventure and arcade-like interests at the same time.

Still not completely thought out is packaging. Loveless indicates, however, that packaging will be very book-like and browseable.

"It could be in paperback size," he notes. "Obviously it has to accommodate the diskette. It may be larger but it will have to be like a book in that consumers can get a better idea of what it is all about. Up until now, I think, the entertainment software industry has had a lot of self-defeating boxes. There were great graphics on the front, a few screen shots on the back and some explanation and the consumer took his chances. We want to make it more like a book purchase. With books, you might be attracted by a sharp cover graphic but you have the ability to browse through it and then decide if you want it or not. I think that's the way to go.

"And this is a key aspect for the software retailer," he analyzes. "With so much product moving into mass merchandising channels, the software has to expose itself more and more. The best salesperson will be the software package itself. We will be providing demo disks and counter cards. No one has seen this type of software before. The package will emulate the book but like a good detective novel, the mystery will remain until you get to the end. That will be a very important part of this new software. The electronic book, if you will, will offer you different ways to get to the end."

"The biggest seller I've had in the science fiction category," says Bob Schwartz, Games Unlimited, Pittsburgh, "has been *Planetfall*, although *Suspended* did quite well. SSI's *Questron* and *Cosmic Balance* have done well also.

"A good role playing, fantasy game such as *Wizardry*, the *Ultima* trilogy, or *Temple Of Apshai* will outsell a science fiction game about four to one although both groups have about the same num-

ber of products available.

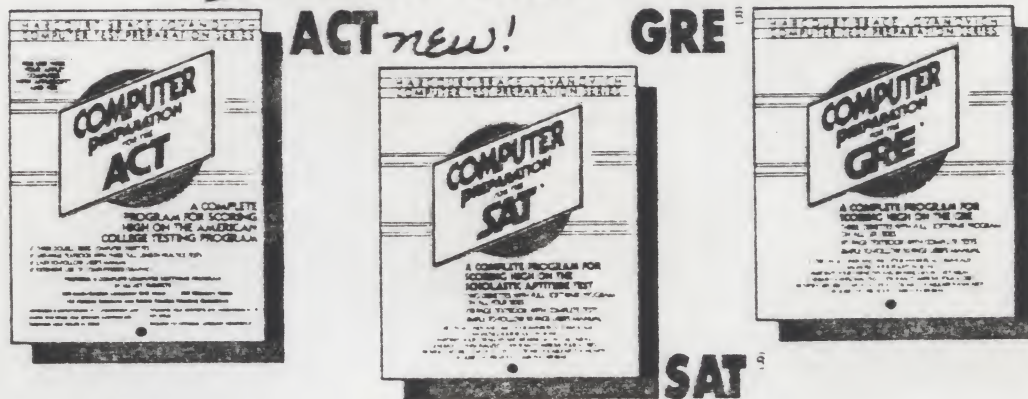
"The key for good science fiction entertainment software is to combine the best elements of Infocom as well as the best elements of fantasy, role playing games with science fiction themes and they will do very well.

"Customers who buy entertain-

ment software do read a lot. And a lot of what they read is science or science fiction. I know that from observing my own customers. And the trend, without question, is to more thought-provoking."

Richard Paul Zucker is a New York-based freelance writer.

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Automated Adventure

BY BRIAN HALL

Infocom's computer games use artificial intelligence to make pulp fiction interactive.

LATE LAST NIGHT, groggy from long hours in front of

a CRT screen, I turned off the



Rainbow and headed out of the office. On my way to the elevator, I asked the cleaning woman who was vacuuming the floor if the building would be open on the following Monday, a holiday. She stopped her work, looked at me and shrugged.

"I don't know," she said.

Ha! I figured she knew all right. I just had to ask her the right question. "Tell me about Monday," I tried.

"I tell ya, I don't know," she replied.

I tried another time: "Are you working on Monday?"

She was getting testy: "Listen buddy, I haven't looked up the schedule in the last 10 minutes, so I don't know! Jeez!" She switched the vacuum cleaner on again, drowning out any additional questions.

Hmmmm, I thought. I guess I only get three questions on that. I'll have to be more clever next time.

I got into the elevator. There were 10 buttons: "L" through "10." I pushed "L" and was surprised when the elevator door shut and I felt myself going down. That was easy. I thought. Too easy. The motion stopped: there was a pause. Then the door began to open. What will happen, I wondered. Will a thousand tons of sand pour into the elevator and crush me? Will the lobby be full of murderers and thieves? The door opened and the lobby was empty. Whew. I headed for the front door.

No, valued readers, I'm not a paranoid schizophrenic. I'm just suffering from *Infomania Debilitatis*. In plain English, I've been playing too many Infocom computer games, but it was wonderful fun while it lasted. Long after I'd done the research for this story, I would stay up until 3 a.m., trying to get past the man-eating grues that lived beneath the waterfall, or replacing fused

ILLUSTRATIONS: RON HAUGE

fromitz boards in the malfunctioning planetary course control system. When first playing the games, I reacted to some of the more realistic characters as if they were flesh and blood, but after hours of ardent game-playing in the two-dimensional world of Infocom characters, I had some trouble relating to human beings. But the excitement of playing the games easily outweighs the minor shortcomings.

Apparently many computer game enthusiasts agree—Infocom sold 350,000 games last year alone. The games are a marketing and programming phenomenon. Infocom's important proprietary programming techniques have kept it far ahead of its competitors in terms of the complexity and realism of its games, and the creative, slick, often funny packaging of its products has pushed the company beyond the \$6 million annual sales mark. Those who've never played an Infocom game, especially those people who consider computer games beneath them, are in for a revelation. These games are great fun for imaginative users.

Fifteen Infocom games are currently on the market, and new ones are coming out at a rate of about five per year. Prices range from \$39.95 to \$49.95. The games, which run on both the Rainbow and the PDP-11, are ranked in four different levels of complexity, from Junior (ages 9 and up) to Expert (geniuses of any age), and are categorized along

All of the games make the user an active participant.

the lines of pulp fiction: fantasy, mystery, adventure, and science-fiction (see "Infocom Games"). If you've got the time and the imagination for a good adventure, or if you simply want to take a peek at the latest in DEC-compatible artificial intelligence, Infocom's games are a blast and a bargain.

OLD-FASHIONED FUN

Although the programming behind the Infocom games is state-of-the-art, the entertainment they offer is rooted in some of the oldest traditions of riddles and storytelling, in thrills, chills and cliff-hanger endings. Several of the games are reminiscent of pulp novels and the great old B-movies of the 1930s and 1940s. "Somebody's going to take the deep six!" warns the cover package of the hard-boiled mystery game, *Witness*, and after a few hours questioning the game's cast of post-Prohibition era ne'er-do-wells, you're tempted to second-guess your suspects by propping your legs up on your desk

and slowly rolling a cigarette, Bogart-style.

It's easy to get carried away in the heat of an Infocom game, and that's no coincidence. The games' fanciful story lines and interactivity are designed to stimulate the imagination. It also is no coincidence that the Infocom games do not use graphics. Graphics have no place in the popular fiction to which these games pay homage. Infocom sometimes refers to its products as "participatory novels" and it is not kidding. Infocom insiders denigrate graphic games like *Space Invaders* as "flashy" and "meretricious" and point out that the best graphic images are the ones conjured up in a player's imagination. They contend that a good book, or better yet, a good radio play, can conjure up mental images that even George Lucas couldn't evoke in his movies.

Infocom makes the same point about its games. The staff writers work hard to enhance the "mental imagery" of each game. They pile on descriptive detail which is intended more to paint a colorful picture in a player's mind (see "Scenes from Planetfall") than to help solve the puzzle at hand. One hopes Infocom will be more successful than the old radio networks in convincing customers that graphics, be they ever so fancy, are crutches for lazy imaginations.

All of the Infocom games make you, the user, an active participant. As the situation unfolds, the game will wait for your action

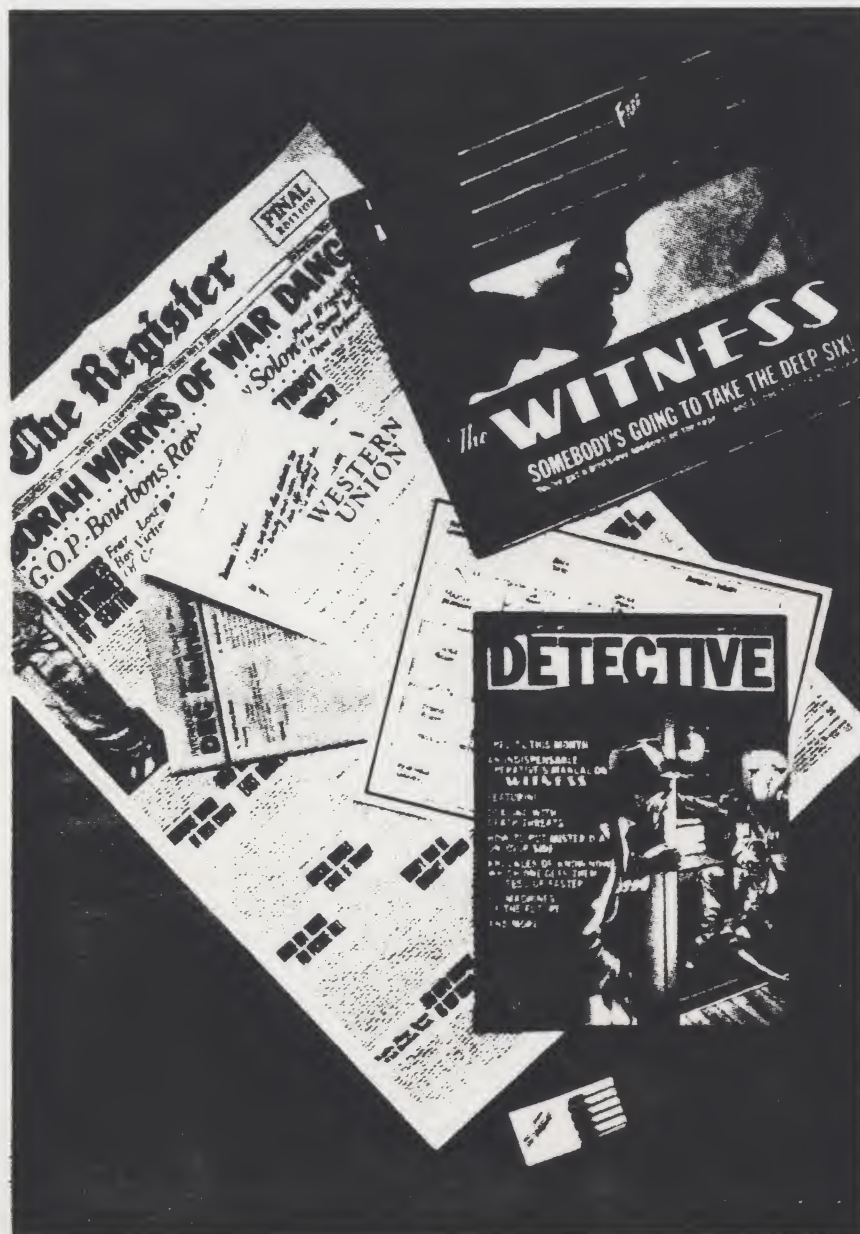


FIGURE 1: INFOCOM'S PACKAGING (left) is well known for its creativity and polish. In addition to being attractive, the game packets can include information and clues not found on the game disks. They therefore allow the games to be more complex by freeing up disk-space for other information.

FIGURE 2: THE GAME WRITERS (below) are the heart of Infocom. After spending months designing a game, they have to spend even longer debugging it. It can be a tiring, hair-raising process. Pictured here are, from left to right, Steve Meretzky, Stu Galley and Jerry Wolper in the back row, and Dave Lebling, Marc Blank and Michael Bertyn in the front row. A seventh writer, Brian Moriarty, is not pictured.



and you will score points as you solve certain problems. Eventually, the game will tell you the maximum number of points that you can win. You can use this knowledge to judge how close you are to reaching your goal, even if it takes a bit of playing to figure out what that goal is. The game also will tell you (quite politely, as a rule) when you are doing something that is of no importance, such as asking a corpse a question, or attempting an action that the game program does not understand. If you find yourself completely confused, there are a few ways to get back on the path (see "Aid for the Puzzled").

■ PLAYING THE GAME

While researching this article, I played six of the Infocom games, three to completion. In *Zork*, I tried to amass 20 pieces of treasure from the subterranean labyrinth while a thief repeatedly stole them back, and occasionally killed me. In *Planetfall*, I ran from mutants, contracted the plague, worked with a klutzy robot, saved the planet, got the girl and was named Galactic Overlord (a heady triumph for a lowly ensign, seventh class). I saw a man shot to death in *Witness* and then I botched up the investigation; all of my evidence was thrown back in my face, and none of the suspects I arrested was even indicted on the basis of my flimsy evidence. In *Infidel*, I desecrated a Moslem holy day, found the lost pyramid, decoded the computo-hieroglyphics, penetrated to the sarcophagus and suffered the fate of all those who do not believe. In *Sorcerer*, I collected spells, drank potions and went to the amusement park like any fun-loving enchanter. I died an impressive number of times and eventually saved the kingdom from a gruesome fate described in the purplest of prose.

For the most part, the rules are learned in the playing. Infocom supplies a single reference card that tells you how to load the game diskette onto your system. From there, you're on your own. Before you start to play, you should take a careful look at the game paraphernalia inside the package (Fig. 1). Although undeniably swanky—the work is done by Infocom's award-winning advertising firm, Giardini/Russell of Watertown, Massachusetts—they are not just for decoration, and they will provide you with the information you need to begin. More importantly, they probably will give you a clue (sometimes a veiled one) as to what the goal of the game is.

Inside the *Sorcerer* game package, you'll find the game diskette, an issue of *Popular Enchanting* and a rotating cardboard wheel with illustrations and brief descriptions of the creatures of Frobozz Infotater. The large, mirror-like amulet adorning the front panel of the silver-specked game package beckons you to read the mysterious message: "Bel-boz, the most powerful of all enchanter, has vanished, and a new evil threatens the kingdom. Gaze now into the amulet of Aggthora and let be revealed the one valorous enough to rescue the land and earn the title of Sorcerer."

If you accept the challenge, you take out the game diskette and copy the "Sorcerer.dat" and "Sorcerer.cmd" files from the game diskette onto your own formatted diskette. Insert your copy of *Sorcerer* into your computer, type **sorcerer** and...

You are in a strange location, but you cannot remember how you got here. Everything is hazy, as though viewed through a gauze.

Twisted Forest

You are on a path through a blighted forest. The trees are sickly, and there is no undergrowth at all. One tree here looks climbable. The path, which ends here, continues to the northeast. A hellhound is racing straight toward you, its open jaws displaying rows of razor-sharp teeth...

I picked this game because it has a wham-o beginning. Well, it seems you had better scam. You decide against the tree, for the moment, just in case hellhounds eat trees, and at the prompt, you type **ne** (Infocomtalk for "go northeast," or even "run like hell northeast"). The game responds:

Forest Edge

To the west, a path enters the blighted woods, which stretch out of sight. A signpost stands beside another path leading north, and to the east is a wide meadow. At the base of the signpost is a slimy hole leading down. The hellhound stops at the edge of the forest and bellows. After a moment, it turns and

slinks into the trees.

Whew. (None of *Sorcerer*'s other perils will be as easy to escape as the hellhound.) Now you are free to explore. You can go in any direction for which there is a path. You can read the sign. You can look into the hole. You can even just stand there and catch your breath, by typing **wait**.

You also can go back and try different solutions to every problem. Say that instead of typing **ne** back in the forest, you had typed **kick hellhound**, just to see if the hellhound's bark was worse than its bite. Well, unfortunately, this would happen:

Kicking the hellhound doesn't do anything. The hellhound reaches you and tears you apart with its powerful teeth.

So much for old adages. Surviving, you see, is entirely up to you. The writers at Infocom, perhaps perpetually grumpy from all their debugging work, are more bloodthirsty than most of the people you'd want to invite over for dinner—and you will certainly die many times in *Sorcerer* before you manage to save your corner of the universe.

■ A LOOK AT THE INFOKINS

The people behind the technology at Infocom are as interesting as the games themselves. Infocom employs 70 people with impressive backgrounds in computers, artificial intelligence, business management and marketing. Glass cases on the walls of

INFOCOM GAMES

GAME	FICTION GENRE	LEVEL OF DIFFICULTY	AUTHOR(S)	PRICE FOR RAINBOW AND DECIMATE*	PRICE FOR PDP-11**
ZORK I	Fantasy	Standard	Marc Blank & Dave Lebling	\$39.95	\$39.95
ZORK II	Fantasy	Advanced	same as above	\$44.95	\$44.95
ZORK III	Fantasy	Advanced	same as above	\$44.95	\$44.95
ENCHANTER	Fantasy	Standard	same as above	\$39.95	\$39.95
SORCERER	Fantasy	Advanced	Steve Meretzky	\$44.95	\$44.95
DEADLINE	Mystery	Expert	Marc Blank	\$49.95	\$49.95
WITNESS	Mystery	Standard	Stu Galley	\$39.95	\$39.95
SUSPECT	Mystery	Advanced	Dave Lebling	***	***
STARCROSS	Sci-Fi	Expert	Dave Lebling	\$49.95	\$49.95
SUSPENDED	Sci-Fi	Expert	Michael Berlyn	\$49.95	\$49.95
PLANETFALL	Sci-Fi	Standard	Steve Meretzky	\$39.95	\$39.95
INFIDEL	Adventure	Advanced	Michael Berlyn	\$44.95	\$44.95
SEASTALKER	Adventure	Junior	Stu Galley & Jim Lawrence	***	\$39.95
CUTTHROATS	Adventure	Standard	Michael Berlyn & Jerry Wolper	***	***
HITCHHIKER'S GUIDE TO THE GALAXY	Sci-Fi	Standard	Douglas Adams & Steve Meretzky	***	***

* Runs under CP/M.

** Runs under RT-11 and RSTS.

*** Scheduled to be available this spring.

Note: Prices are Infocom's suggested retail prices. Games may cost more if purchased through a DEC dealership. Game packaging also may vary.

Infocom's offices are filled, like the trophy case in *Zork*, with awards for quality from *Omni*, *InfoWorld* and *Rolling Stone*. Golden diskettes proclaim Infocom "Software Best Seller" for 1983 and 1984. New games are designed on the two DEC 2060 mainframes that sit in the basement.

At the heart of the company, there are seven writers on the staff who spend all of their time designing games and debugging them (Fig. 2). These writers, in Infocom's own tongue-in-cheek words, are "the Infokins—our little helpers who alone know the secret

of creating interactive fiction."

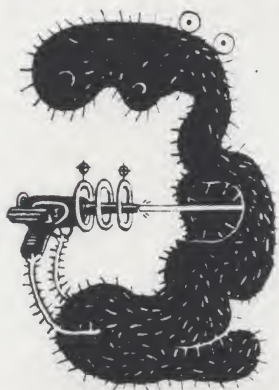
It all began with a game called *Adventure*, which was developed at Stanford in the mid-1970s. The object of the game was to collect treasure and survive. *Adventure*'s program incorporated what would now be considered a rather primitive syntax analyzer, or parser: It understood two-word commands that were derived from a recognized vocabulary of several hundred words. In playing the game, for example, a player could type **drop box** or **take sword**, but typing anything more complicated would earn him a reprimand from

the computer.

When *Adventure* arrived at MIT, it created a sensation. For a couple of weeks, lots of intelligent people were spending all their spare time fighting snakes and hording jewel-encrusted gewgaws. When the game was finished, the tools were at hand at MIT to write another one—a better one. Marc Blank and Dave Lebling did just that, using MDL, a machine-independent language based on LISP that was developed by Blank, Chris Reeve and others at MIT in the early 1970s. By 1977, working on a PDP-10, the team wrote *Zork*, a classic known to practically any computer game aficionado born on this planet. *Zork* is arguably the most famous and most successful prose computer game ever written.

By 1980, the programming tools had been developed to adapt *Zork* to microcomputers, and some of the game pioneers at MIT had incorporated. The company's first practical step was to contract with a publisher to distribute *Zork* for microcomputers. People started buying. The new company renegotiated for the rights to sell *Zork* itself. People kept buying. Infocom was on its way.

■ SCENES FROM PLANETFALL



COMPUTER: SUDDENLY, WITH A LOUD PLOP, a giant elephant-sized monster lands on the strip just in front of you. It is amorphously shaped, its skin a slimy translucent red membrane. While most of your brain screams with panic about the disgusting monster that now blocks your exit, some small section in the back of your mind calmly realizes that this is merely some tiny microbe which has somehow violated the sterile environment of the computer interior.

As you stand frozen with fear, the microbe slithers toward you, extending slimy pseudo-pods thick with waving cilia. It looks pretty hungry, and seems intent on having you for lunch.

Middle of Strip

You are standing on a section of the strip with a bottomless void stretching out on both sides. The strip continues to the north and south. The hungry microbe blocks your way, its cilia waving and its pseudo-pods towering over you.

The monster wriggles nearer. It is now so close that you can make out details in the protoplasm beneath its translucent skin. The laser has cooled, but its still feels somewhat warm.

PLAYER: Fire laser at microbe.

COMPUTER: The laser beam strikes the microbe. The monster rears back for a moment, but almost as soon as the beam goes off, it advances again. Two protoplasm-filled blobs sneak toward you from the left. You jump to the side and almost fall off the strip into the void below!

PLAYER: Again.

COMPUTER: The laser beam strikes the microbe. The microbe's outer membrane sizzles a bit, and some protoplasm oozes out. The microbe recoils momentarily, but quickly recovers. Its slimy pseudo-pod brushes against your shoulder. You twist away in the nick of time.

PLAYER: Again.

COMPUTER: The laser beam strikes the microbe. The microbe's outer membrane sizzles a bit, and some protoplasm oozes out. The microbe recoils momentarily, but quickly recovers.

Two protoplasm-filled blobs sneak toward you from the left. You jump to the side and almost fall off the strip into the void below! Another pseudo-pod, perhaps attracted by the warmth of the laser, tries to envelope the weapon. You snatch it away from the monster's grasp.

The laser feels very warm now, but that doesn't seem to affect its performance at all.

PLAYER: Again.

COMPUTER: The laser beam strikes the microbe. The beam slices through the microbe's skin! A tremendous shudder passes through the microbe, but the wound quickly heals itself.

A slimy pseudo-pod brushes against your shoulder. You twist away in the nick of time. Another pseudo-pod, perhaps attracted by the warmth of the laser, tries to envelope the weapon. You snatch it away from the monster's grasp.

PLAYER: Throw laser into void.

COMPUTER: As the laser flies over the edge of the strip, the hungry microbe lunges after it. Both the laser and the microbe plummet into the void. (Whew!)

■ SOFTWARE SECRETS

In developing *Zork*, the founders of Infocom made two crucial advances in programming—advances of which the company is still the sole proprietor. First, they enhanced the *Adventure* parser. As early as 1977, the mainframe version of *Zork* could understand certain kinds of full sentences, incorporating adjectives, indirect objects, even prepositional phrases. For example, in *Zork* a player could direct the computer to **put the red book in the trashbin**. This greatly expanded the possibilities of the puzzles with which players could be confronted and also heightened the game's sense of realism. Now you could look behind curtains and throw salt over your left shoulder. You could close your eyes and pray. If you couldn't kill the troll with the sword, you could try throwing the lantern at him—and if that didn't work, you could say insulting things about his mother. The enhanced parser in *Zork* and all subsequent Infocom games allows the player, for the first time, to be humorous, even playful. And that, of course, is what games are all about.

The second software breakthrough came with the scaling down of *Zork* into three micro versions and the development of Infocom's own machine computer language, ZIL (which stands for "Zork Interactive Language"—what else?). ZIL allows games to be modified, or "translated," relatively painlessly to run on more than a dozen major brands of micros and on minis.

Other companies could obtain a license to use MDL if they wanted to. But MDL is not enough; it is only the beginning of a workable system for programming interactive games. "If somebody has MDL, they have a toolbox. But what we have here [ZIL] is something that we built using that toolbox. It

Programming

■ a genuine game character is much harder than programming, say, the sword in *Zork*.

is a whole shop that lets us make these products," says Infocom writer Dave Lebling. One of the reasons that Infocom was able to build a practical, machine-independent language when other companies could not was that several of the original developers of MDL now work at Infocom. Marc Blank, for example, is now the company's vice president of product development.

Under his direction, a new spy thriller is being written. And as always, the basic research continues as constantly and secretly as new product development. When asked about parser development, Infocom writers say only, "We're working on it." That's understandable—any further improvements in a parser that a microcomputer could handle would be a breakthrough not only in interactive games, but in artificial intelligence in general.

■ LIMITS OF THE GAME

The cutting edge of any field always has its ragged side, and Infocom is still wrestling with problems. The limitations of the company's parser are apparent in varying degrees among the different games. The closer the game is to a pure puzzle, the more completely it fulfills its promise.

The three *Zork* games are the least story-oriented of the lot. A player is not given a personality or a background; nothing in *Zork* comes up and speaks to a player, or expects a player to speak to it; the game does not threaten, at every turn, to become realistic. By typing directions at his terminal, a player simply moves from room to room of a labyrinth. At times a player encounters objects, many of which will be needed to solve problems later on, and a few of which are useless. Whatever a player does affects the parameters of the game, but in simple ways. If a player drops a sword down the stairs, it will be lying at the bottom when he descends those stairs.

In most of the other games, the level of interaction is closer to the cutting edge of what Infocom's programmers can do. Thus, the limitations of the programming are more evident. These other games are sometimes called "participatory novels" or "prose adventures." As staff writer Michael Berlyn says about the game *Planetfall*, "It is not a puzzle. It has a lot of puzzle elements in it, but it's really a story-line, primarily because of a player's interaction with Floyd." Floyd is the one genuine character in *Planetfall*; he is a robotic case of arrested development, and while a player explores, Floyd follows, telling stories about his past and loudly

worrying about rust. As a walking, talking member of this klutzy exploring duo, Floyd requires a much higher level of programming than, say, the sword in *Zork*.

And some of the other games are still more complicated. A mystery, like *Witness*, consists of almost nothing but characters, and instead of picking up objects and moving them from room to room, a player tries to get the characters to volunteer information. These characters are not easy to deal with. If a player asks the wrong questions, or asks the right questions at the wrong time, the characters will clam up. They might even get nasty. Needless to say, the programming difficulties here are gargantuan, and the degree to which Infocom manages to finess them is exhilarating.

But the truly "participatory novel" seems still to be in the future. As yet, the characters in the games are too rigid to qualify as real characters in a plot, or as instigators of action. Floyd, for example, is an endearing fixture of *Planetfall*, but he is still basically an object: If a player manipulates him correctly, he will perform his functions effectively. A "Tale of Adventure," such as *Infidel*, does begin with a story, and it assigns a player a (rather unattractive) personality, but once the player has found and entered the lost

pyramid, he is back on familiar *Zork* territory, going from room to room, trying to get around obstacles and encountering useful and useless objects.

Similarly, in *Witness*, suspects will exhibit a disconcerting immobility; like objects, they are waiting for a player to act on them, and if a player does not act, they will do precious little. Entering the beautiful Monica's room, for example, a player will find her softly sobbing on the bed. The player can then wait for an hour in the room and at the end of that hour, she is still on the bed, sobbing. She does not seem to know that anyone has been present all this time. When the characters have set speeches, they deliver them with aplomb, but a player's questions can elicit awkward, illusion-shattering replies—such as "You're the detective!" which even the politest and most craven character will throw at a player any time he asks a question that the program does not expect him to ask at that moment.

These limitations are all the more disconcerting because the "character" games—unlike *Zork*—invite comparison with reality. They set up situations that are so real, a player feels he should be able to interact in real ways; but when he tries to answer one of the characters in kind, the player is immediately called to account. Nitpicking aside, you can never satisfy a computer addict. These games, however, come very close to that goal. "Puzzles" still describes the current games better than "participatory novels," but when you're having this much fun, who wants to argue? ■

(Brian Hall is a freelance writer who lives in Lexington, Massachusetts.)

■ AID FOR THE PUZZLED

INEVITABLY, THERE WILL BE times when you are playing an Infocom game and you are stumped. Usually, it is enough simply to turn off the game and come back to it later (you can save any position in the game by typing—you guessed it—*save*). Or you might enlist the help of a friend. But now and then, you may run into a problem that leaves you completely bewildered. This can be frustrating, because often whole "territories" of a game are closed to you until you figure out how to open them up. If this happens, take heart—Infocom offers help in a delightful way.

For \$7.95, you can send away for a booklet called *InvisiClues* for your particular game. The booklet asks all the same stupid questions that you might be asking, and it answers them, with a series of graduated hints, in invisible ink. By using the special marker enclosed, you can make only the hints or answers that you need appear. The company has been clever enough to include a number of misleading questions in every booklet, so that you cannot conclude too much about the game simply by reading the questions. Indeed, the answers to these fake questions are often as funny as anything you'll find in the texts of the games themselves. If you order a booklet, you also will get a map of the game, which you should not look at unless you absolutely must.

For this support material we have to thank Michael Dornbrook, now product manager at Infocom and formerly an independent tester of the games. In addition to founding a support group which pieced together maps and hint booklets, Dornbrook also started the *New Zork Times*, a quarterly that he still publishes. Anyone who decides to become a full-fledged fan of the Infocom products will find information about the Zork User's Group in the game packages.

"Good taste is better than bad taste, but bad taste is better than no taste at all." — Arnold Bennett

Braving the new world of 'Zork' in computer fiction

By Steven Kosek

A data processing instructor at Elgin Community College who formerly taught English literature at several Chicago area schools

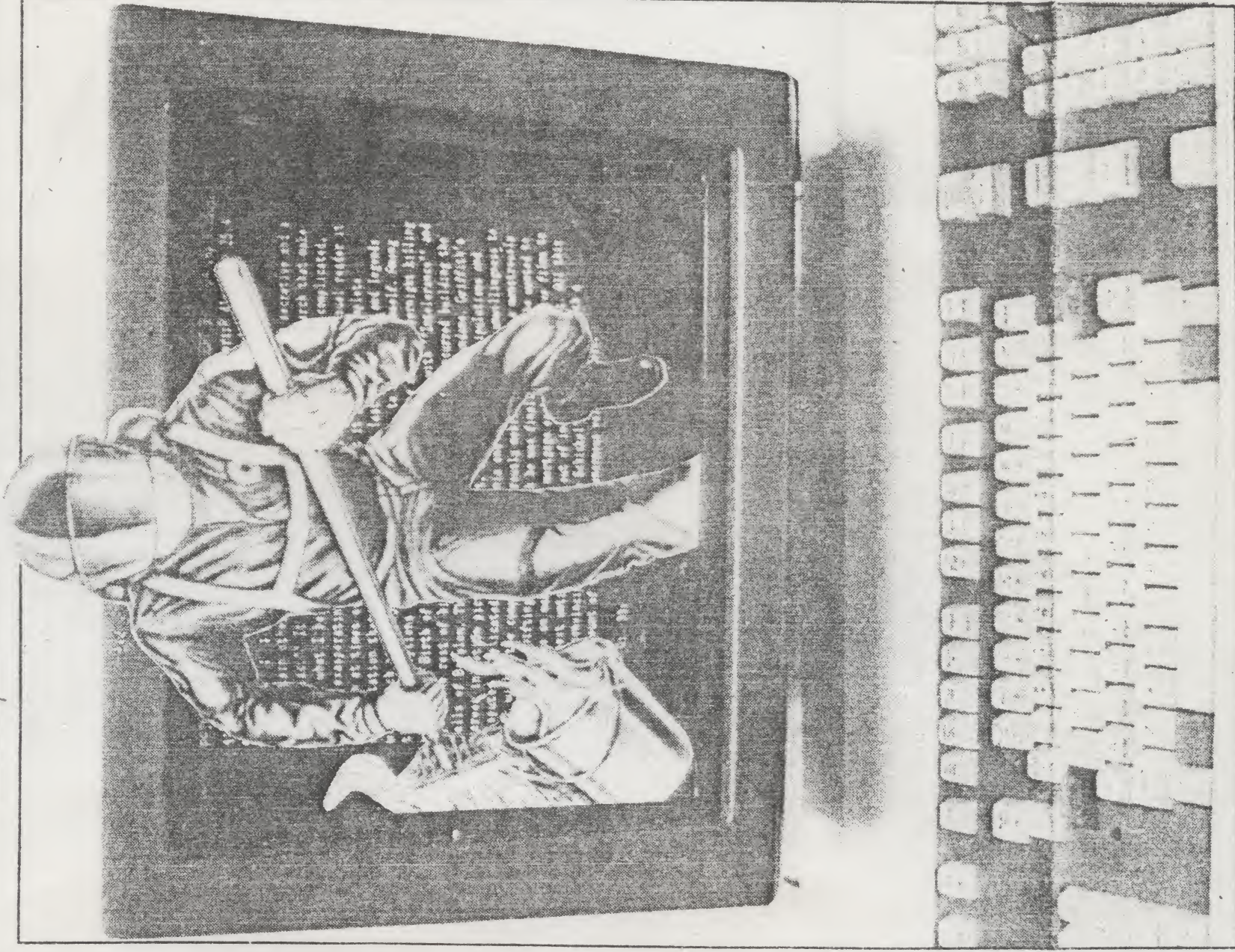
If I seem a bit sullen, it's because earlier today I was killed in a short story.

It was my own fault. I had been mopping up Deck 9 of the starship Feinstein when an explosion rocked the halls. I got safely into the escape pod, but I didn't have brains enough to strap myself in. When the pod detached from the ship, I was flung against the wall and killed.

Of course, you come to expect this sort of sudden death when reading "Planetfall," one of 10 "computer novels" from Infocom. Unlike ordinary novels, where the reader silently follows the events happening to fictional characters, each computer novel is a complex story problem in which the reader is the main character. His objectives are to stay alive, take part in an adventure and gather points in the fictional world created by the computer.

That world is fashioned with words on the screen of a microcomputer. The novel itself is a program on a floppy diskette; it controls the flow of the narrative while the reader types in his part at the computer keyboard, using a limited vocabulary of about 600 words. There are no graphics at all. Each sentence written by the reader produces some effect in the story. Time passes, events transpire, characters come and go. You eat, you sleep, you even dream. And if you do something dumb, you die.

Dying is easy in the computer novel. In "Planetfall," I have starved to death, drowned, died from exhaustion, and been vaporized in an explosion. I was once beaten to death for striking a superior officer. I should have known better. In each case I watched helplessly as the words "you



Tribune graphic based on Infocom's computer novel "Planetfall"

imagine what they might someday lead to. But my imagination falls short. Like a man of the 1920s, seeing his first silent film, I can only ponder the next few obvious steps. But even such short-range speculation is a problem when developments in artificial intelligence and the existence of machines with voice-recognition and speech capabilities point to a day close by when we'll be talking to computers and they'll be answering. What effect all of this will have on the verbally creative people of the world remains to be seen. At the moment, most of the software writers with Infocom are programmers first, authors second. But I imagine we will soon see some of our novelists turning to the computer not just to process words but as a medium of expression. And when that happens, things should really start to get interesting.

In the meantime, let me just say that if you have access to a microcomputer, get yourself to a bookstore. Here are the Infocom selections you'll find there:

Zork I: The Great Underground Empire. This is the first of a trilogy. You explore an underground empire in search of 20 treasures. Wicked trolls and slavering grues threaten your progress.

Zork II: The Wizard of Frobozz. In the second volume, you explore more of the underground empire and meet the Wizard of the realm, who seems to be both friend and foe.

Zork III: The Dungeon Master. The final volume opens with this hypnotic passage: "As in a dream, you see yourself fumbling down a great, dark stairway. All about you are shadowy images of struggles against fierce opponents and diabolical traps. Yet more underground escapades in the land of Dimwit Flathead."

Deadline. You play the classic gumshoe detective, faced with a dead body, a locked room, six good suspects, and only 12 hours to solve the crime. Infocom provides you with a dossier containing lab reports, interviews with the suspects and more. You also have an assistant, Sergeant Duffy, who conducts lab tests on the evidence you unearth during your investigation.

Suspended. In this very inventive science-fiction narrative, you have been brought out of suspended animation to help solve the technical problems occurring in a futuristic

er account. In these games, you explore an underground kingdom, searching for clues by the way they integrate the

case I watched helplessly as the words "You have died" appeared on the computer screen. When this happens, the novel becomes something of a short story, which you must begin again, this time with the wisdom gained from your last reading.

The 10 computer novels published by Infocom, a software firm devoted to the development of computer text adventures, are distributed in bookstores by Addison-Wesley. Unlike video arcade games like "Space Invaders" and "Pac-Man," which rely on graphics to represent a game board, text adventures use only words to depict the world. The player does not use a joystick to control a figure on the screen; he himself "moves" through a fictional world by typing directions at a keyboard. The computer describes the situation and the player tells the computer what to do next. For example the computer may display:

"You are in a large room with three doors. There is a large mirror on the north wall."

The player at the keyboard has a number of options in this case. He might try to open one of the doors or he might look in the mirror—or behind the mirror. To look in the mirror, he would type: "Look in the mirror."

If you do this in one of the Infocom novels, the computer might tell you: "You see an ugly person looking back at you."

The first such adventures predate the microcomputer revolution. They were written for use on larger computers, such as the Digital Dec PDP-11, a mini-computer, and they are still around at larger installations. At Northern Illinois University in De Kalb, for example, you can play the granddaddy of them all, a game simply called "Adventure," if you have the right kind of computer.

underground kingdom, searching for treasures, solving puzzles, killing all foes.

"Zork I," the eldest of Infocom's line, is famous among microcomputer users as a glorified version of the original "Adventure." It appears regularly on Softalk magazine's Top 30 Software Chart for the IBM PC. In fact, there are many other computer text adventures available from other sources as well, including Norell Data Systems and Avalon Hill. Infocom's great achievement, and the reason it is of interest in Book World, is its move away from the dungeons-and-dragons format toward identifiable literary genres. More recent offerings include two murder mysteries, "Deadline" and "The Witness," and three sci-fi thrillers, "Planetfall," "Starcross" and "Suspended." Each is available for most of the popular personal computers, including the Apple IIe, the Commodore 64 and the IBM PC. They range in price from \$39.95 to \$49.95.

Of course, even before Addison-Wesley came along, Infocom had been singled out by computer magazines as the premier maker of text adventures. But no one was calling these adventure novels. They were role-playing fantasy games; the objective was to score points. And so there will be those who will say that the "computer novel" label and the bookstore distribution approach are merely clever marketing moves. Calling a game a novel does not make it a novel.

However, there are good reasons for calling them novels—even if that's not literally what they are. The problem is that they appear to be an entirely new and different literary form for which there is yet no word. That they are literary is indisputable: They use words to convey an experience over time in a fictional world. That

obvious by the way they integrate the reader into the story. It is no longer enough for him simply to perform in his mind the words of an author; in this new literary form, he must actually write parts of the text. He must create his role in the story.

This last point is particularly notable because we live at a time when the act of reading has become the focal point of literary investigation. Writers and critics alike have become intrigued by the reader, and reading itself is now said to be a creative act, like writing. We also live at a time when many writers, such as Raymond Federman, Gilbert Sorrentino and Ronald Sukenick, have been groping for some new way to use words, mostly with little success.

The computer text adventure seems to track well with these current trends, to satisfy certain literary needs. It offers writers a new and virtually unexplored way to use words, one that requires the writer to find novel routes for tapping the reader's resources. It offers readers a greater role in the creative process. All of which brings us back to Infocom, the best source for this new genre. Infocom adventures are particularly well-written, with detailed descriptions, clever plot twists, surprising characters and a strong dose of zany humor. Most importantly, they are expertly programmed and thoroughly tested. For the most part, they have a response ready for even the silliest instruction you might enter at the keyboard. And since adventures can take many hours to complete, Infocom has also programmed its games to hold your place when you must interrupt a session for such bothersome activities as sleep and work.

My purpose here is not to evaluate each of the 10 titles. At the moment I'm still too busy marveling at them—and trying to

technical problems occurring in a futuristic city. At your disposal are six robots with six distinct personalities. It's up to you to find out why you've been awakened and to use the robots to repair damage to the city.

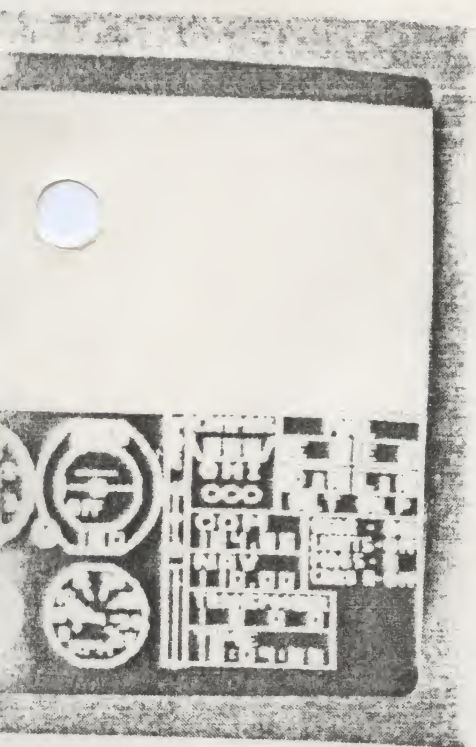
Starcross. Another science fiction adventure. This time you're a miner in deep space who stumbles across an abandoned space station. You explore the installation in your attempt to learn what has happened to the occupants.

Witness. In this murder mystery, the victim is killed right before your very eyes. As in "Deadline," you have only 12 hours to finger the killer. You search for evidence and question a group of quirky suspects.

Infidel. This is the first in a new Tales of Adventure Series, an electronic "Raiders of the Lost Ark." Partial maps and a letter from a missing archeologist are your only guides as you search for the Lost Pyramid.

Planetfall. Called by "Creative Computing" the best entry-level adventure from Infocom, it also gets my vote for best packaging. "Planetfall" comes with a diary, a Stellar Patrol Recruiting Manual ["The Patrol is looking for a Few Good Organisms"], a set of postcards ["Wriggle on over to Nebulon—Home of the Worm People!"] and a plastic Stellar Patrol ID, complete with magnetic strip.

Enchanter. The newest addition from Infocom is a return to the swords-and-sorcery milieu. Here you are cast in the role of the sorcerer's apprentice, sent on a mission to dethrone a wicked wizard. Your only weapons are the spells you learned in magic classes and any others you might learn along the way. Among them are "rezroz" [opens locked or enchanted doors and gates], "cleesh" [turns beings into frogs] and "frotz" [turns darkness into light].



Simulator before takeoff, with the distance at left.

which I escaped only by turning off the machine and restarting.

So even though this isn't a flight simulator of the Link trainer variety with the satisfying feel of genuine airplane controls to yank on while sitting in a cockpit, it still has much to offer. Call it a \$50 Link and capitalize on all the learning that's available. I only wish the manual went into more detail considering all the program has to offer.

—Dick Fugett

Flight Simulator

Microsoft
5 1/4" disk, manual, \$49.95
list price

Hardware requirements:

- IBM PC; 64K, disk drive

Information and nearest
dealer location available
from:

Microsoft Corporation
10700 Northup Way
Bellevue, WA 98004
(206) 828-8089

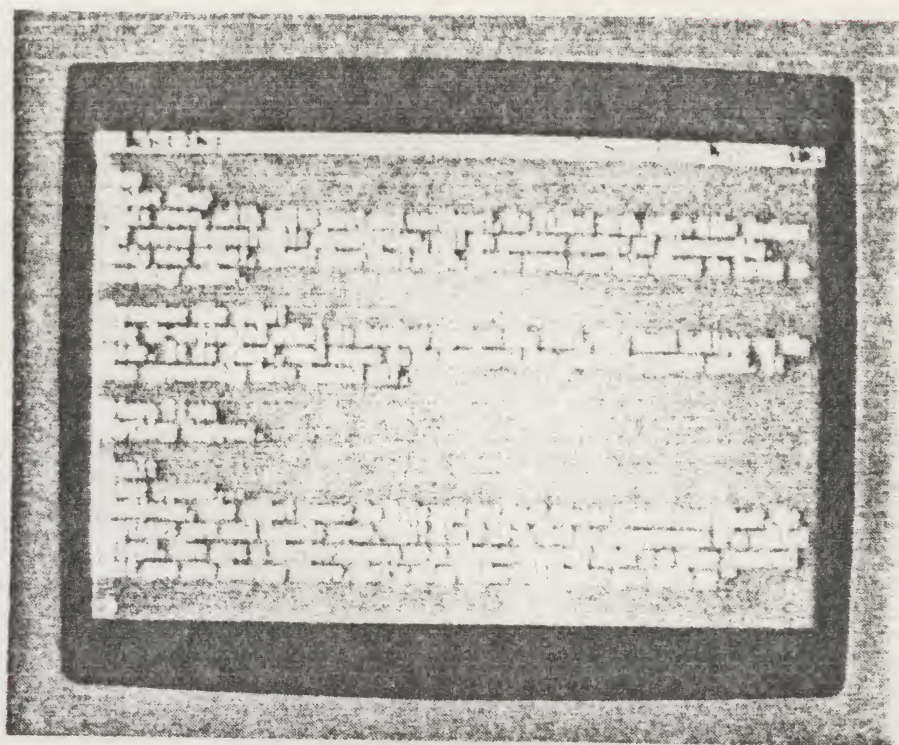
Planetfall

If you like treasure hunts and the challenges of logical puzzles, you should give adventure games a whirl. *Planetfall* is one of the best I've seen.

Infocom's "interactive prose adventures" are the cooler part of the game spectrum. No joysticks or paddles to jockey; just your intellectual powers get exercised. They are faintly addictive (this review took about six times as long to complete as I had expected) as they present scenarios you direct with simple commands like "push the brown button" or "go north." Some clues are given, but mostly you just figure out how to locate and acquire various treasures (for points) and avoid hazards that can slow you down or occasionally kill you.

Planetfall stars an inept junior officer in the Stellar Patrol who later gets an obtuse robot named Floyd as a sidekick — Floyd doesn't show up, you have to find and activate him.

There's a good deal more humor in this rendition than in Infocom's *ZORK* series of adventures, but since you wind up going through the same areas



A dramatic moment in *Planetfall*: the discovery of Floyd.

repetitively (there's a lot of fumbling along in adventure games, at least for adults), the gags can get a little stale. Balancing this, *Planetfall* has a 600-word vocabulary which allows you to give the game some fairly bizarre instructions and still escape the dreaded "I don't understand that word" response.

The packaging for *Planetfall* should do nothing to dissuade your purchase. Inside are endless authorizations and instructions, in classic military-bureaucratic style, including: "Failure to comply with the above regulations is punishable by the loss of not less than one appendage." You

also get three postcards from the planets you visit to send your friends, like the one from Accardi-3 that cites the "exotic anatomical charms of the Gabrillic Hyphenated Woman."

—Richard Dalton

Planetfall

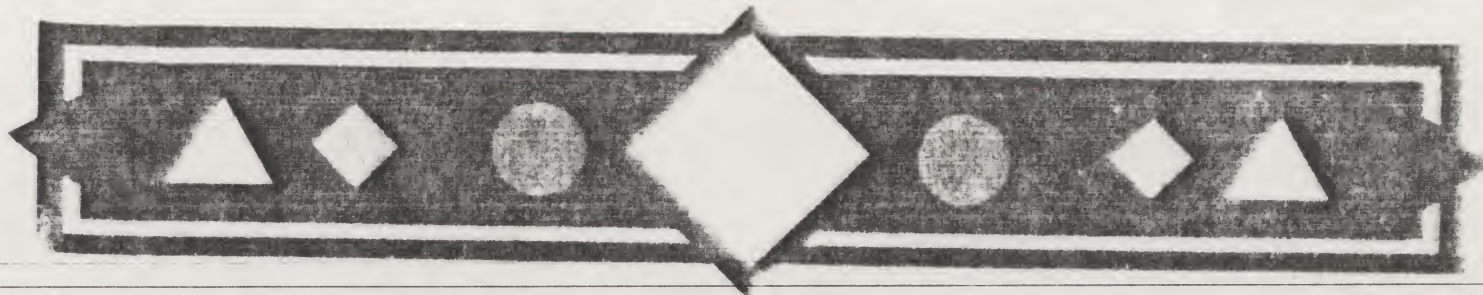
Infocom, Incorporated
5 1/4" disk, \$49.95 list
price

Hardware requirements:

- IBM PC

Information and nearest
dealer location available
from:

Infocom, Incorporated
55 Wheeler Street
Cambridge, MA 02138
(617) 576-3190



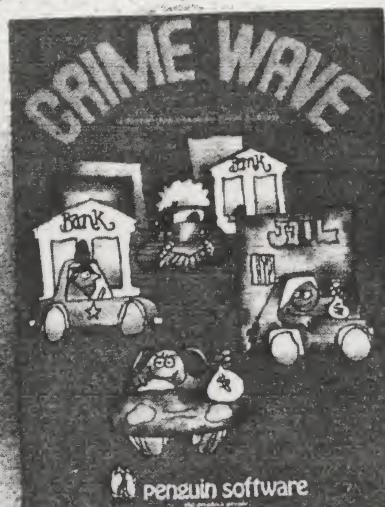
SOME ADVENTURES ARE SO MIND STRETCHING
THAT USER-SUPPORT GROUPS HAVE BEEN
FORMED TO HELP THE HAPLESS.

decent documentation to help avoid the frustration of knowing what you need to do but not being able to communicate it to the computer. Simple explanations of what words you can use and what syntax is acceptable can make the difference between good, challenging fun and misery.

THE VALUE OF COLLATERAL

Although the interactive fiction games do it best, most adventure games are pleasurable partly because you must temper your behavior according to the detailed fictional worlds they create—many with the flavor of science fiction or ancient mythology. The atmosphere of a game is often enhanced by documents of additional fiction that provide background for what happens on the screen. *Kabul Spy* from Sirius includes a telegram to agent 456, for example.

A good example of how complex the impact of these supplementary materials can be is provided by *Ultima III*, which gives a "long lost" document—preserved for 3000 years by an obscure religious sect—that elaborates the mythology behind the game and provides some spiritual supplications good for various minor miracles. Speaking the phrase "G. Lib Rec," for example, "whilst circling thy staff above thy head," gives you access to a "beam me up, Scottie" mode of transportation that members of The Society for Creative Anachronism would feel comfortable with. "As



The ability to get involved in the action of an adventure game is what makes the game enjoyable. You become part of the fantasy.

thou dost fade in one location thou shalt slowly appear in another," according to this ancient liturgy of truth. There is also a book of magical incantations, a history of the reign of Sosarian magnate Lord British, a prophecy hinting at the great conflict ahead, and a map of the world of Sosaria that, alas, the great cartographer Hawkwind did not live to complete. "You will have to use pins or markers to indicate where each (town, castle, and dungeon) lies." Obviously, this is a game with a lot to keep track of, and *Ultima III* complicates the challenge with the element of time. The clock is always ticking, and delay can cause considerable woe.

Given all this complexity, then—and remember that there are games more complex than *Ultima III*, which devotes some of its resources to animated graphics—how long does it take to play an average adventure game? Maybe 30 hours spread out over a month or

two, although much depends on your familiarity with the tricks of the trade and the complexity of the game itself.

While this may seem to require a seemingly major commitment on the player's part—and, indeed, intense involvement is one of the attractions of adventure games—there are games that require lesser investments of time, as well as games aimed specifically at beginning adventurers.

GRAPHICS: SOMETHING LOST, SOMETHING GAINED

Almost all adventure games are too lengthy for a single session, however, so the ability to save a game in progress is essential. Some games allow you to save several different positions in a game, allowing recovery from a fatal error.

Although all-text adventure games are hardly dead—as the recent rise up the best-seller charts of Infocom's *Planetfall* on the strength of Steve Meretzky's fine text shows—graphics and arcade-style action are becoming nearly ubiquitous.

Why would anyone object to graphics? Some argue that even the best of the high-resolution graphics we've seen thus far are less evocative than the pages of your better comic books, limited as they usually are by small computer memories and 8-bit processors. Others say the resolution of the graphics is irrelevant—it's better for the castles, monsters, and alien

ADVENTURE GRAPHICS SEEM TO GET BETTER
WITH EACH BATCH OF NEW GAMES, AND TIME
PROMISES TO ACCELERATE THE TREND.

beings that inhabit adventure games to be rendered only in the player's imagination. A final point is that graphics consume a great deal of a computer's resources, which means the game's author must be satisfied with a simpler basic game structure, thereby sacrificing flexibility and depth, in order to accommodate what is essentially window dressing.

On the other hand, adventure graphics seem to get better with each batch of new games. Moreover, time—and the ever-increasing installed base of computers with memories larger than 64k and 16-bit processors—promises to accelerate the trend.

Arcade action is more and more prevalent as well. Synergistic Software's *Adventure to Atlantis*, Quality Software's *Ali Baba*, and Datamost's *Aztec* all deserve mention for their groundbreaking efforts in animation.

BREAKING NEW GROUND

Until recently, adventure games were generally restricted to fantasy-type settings with occasional forays into the closely related world of science fiction. The format of rooms, clues, puzzles, mazes and variable character traits has also been fairly constant. Interesting variations are becoming more and more common, however, some of which hint at what forms "Adventuredom" is likely to take in the future.

Dark Crystal from Sierra On-



In interactive games, the player is, in effect, inserted into the pages of a novel or the panels of an illustrated fantasy.

line stays on pretty familiar ground in its high-resolution version of the Jim Henson Muppet movie of the same name, but it portends more adaptations of familiar works from the world of cinema and fiction. Expect adventure games based on several science fiction blockbusters, for example, done in cooperation with the authors. Fred Saberhagen, himself the author of more than 20 science fiction novels, has co-founded Berserker Works Limited for just that purpose, and he's not alone in the field.

For the more scientific-minded among you, *Evolution* from Sydney Dataproducts loosely illustrates the theory of evolution with a six-level game. The player starts as an amoeba fighting microbes while trying to eat DNA. The player gradually evolves, going from tadpole to rodent to beaver to gorilla to man, and at the end he is battling genetic mutants, one of whom is undoubtedly man's successor.

The previously mentioned *Planetfall* is one of a number of computer adventure games that fit into the realm of original works of interactive fiction.

But just how far removed is this interactive fiction from the simple adventure game? Marc Blank, author of *Zork*, has written that "understanding—the computer being able to 'get what you mean'—is the quality, the only real quality, that distinguishes a work of interactive fiction from an adventure game." While a sophistication here is undoubtedly important, others argue that the strength of the characterization and plot (or plots, since many variations are possible depending on the player's interaction with the fictional characters) are more crucial to the distinction. In any case, we can expect greater and greater sophistication in interactive fiction as the programs get smarter and the text more literary.

Indeed, it's an exciting time in the game industry. Robert Clardy, an innovative games author, has likened the impact of computers on gaming to the impact of sound on movies.

The advent of such innovations as multiple windows, mouse-based interfaces, and the tremendous leap in the amount of memory programmers have to work with hold immediate promise, and who knows what lies ahead. But one thing is certain: We ain't seen nothin' yet. ■

Name Of the Game: Innovation

Entertainment computer software, though, remains a hot button. It was an exciting category in 1983 and whether delivered at retail or electronically, or a combination of both, in 1984, it promises some exciting innovation.

Despite the genuine hoopla and interest surrounding the home educational and personal productivity/home management fields, it's entertainment software that will continue to be the locomotive that drives the software train into and through 1984. Certainly that was true in 1983 and will hold steady in the next 12 months.

According to best industry estimates, some 30-35 percent of the approximate \$400 million spent in 1983 on home computer software was for entertainment programs. The second largest category was estimated to be programming applications which accounted for some 20-25 percent.

Analysis

Personal productivity and home management generally racked up some 15-20 percent of the total, while education, probably the fastest growing category for 1984, accounted for some five percent.

Entertainment software is expected to continue to rise in market share and may climb as high as 40 percent in the space of three to four years with education coming on fast as well.

As one dealer puts it: "I may sell one or two word processing packages and one or two home accounting packages to a regular customer—but that same customer is going to come back for multiple games and educational software."

Electronic distribution impact

Of course, a number of industry seers are careful to point out, however, that certain other developing factors—such as electronic distribution—may alter predictions and the retail marketplace landscape in the next few years. Example: home accounting software may become part of a household's on-line service. Perhaps the need for purchasing that type of software might not be as great. In fact, if as some observers predict, various types of software, including personal productivity/home management, educational and entertainment are delivered electronically, today's retail projections may be partly invalid by 1987.

More food for thought. What if more and more utility-type software, such as word processing and home management were built into coming generations of machines? Witness Coleco's Adam Family Home Computer and its built-in word processing chip. Where does that leave future publishers of that type of software?

Entertainment computer software, though, remains a hot button. It was an exciting category in 1983 and whether delivered at retail or electronically, or a combination of both, in 1984, it promises some exciting innovation. And innovation and inventiveness are the key operating words here. Recreational computer software in 1984 will offer upgraded intelligence, much more

inviting character development, greatly improved graphics and multi-player capabilities.

1983's top 10

A glance at the top 10 best sellers in the entertainment/recreational field for 1983 reveals such titles as: *Castle Wolfenstein* (Muse); *Choplifter* (Broderbund/Creative); *Frogger* (Sierra On-Line); *Miner 2049er* (Big Five/Micro Lab); *Temple Of Apshai* (EPYX); *Shamus* (Synapse); *Zaxxon* (Datasoft); *Wizardry* (Sir-Tech); and *Zork I* and *Zork II* from Infocom.

As the year closed out, other titles that appeared to be heading for a solid 1984 first quarter were *Lode Runner* (Broderbund); *Planetfall* and *Enchanter* (Infocom); *Star League Baseball* (Gamestar); *Dimension X* (Synapse); *The Tail Of Beta Lyrae* and *Mr. Robot And His Robot Factory* (Datamost); and *One-On-One* (Electronic Arts).

Why did some titles become "hits" in 1983 and others not? Basically, it's a combination of reasons, some obvious, some more subtle. Several titles were on the scene even before 1983 began and have become "classics," titles that dealers typically recommend to first time computer buyers. These include a combination of role-playing, action adventure games which feature a combination of text and graphics and allow the player to embark on some sort of mission in order to rescue a person, city, world, universe, etc. A bonus for the effort might also include a treasure. Along the way the player must utilize his/her wits and the various tools or instruments that may be at his/her disposal. Generally these games require a higher degree of intelligence to play, take a longer time and are thus more rewarding. Programs of this type might include *Castle Wolfenstein*, *Temple of Apshai* and *Wizardry*.

Safe to assume that the publishers of those titles have either released or will issue sequels. *Wizardry*, for example, is already in its third scenario, while a sequel to *Castle Wolfenstein* (with a working title of *Destroy The Fuhrer*) should be released shortly.

Arcade connection

Frogger and *Zaxxon* were big winners in 1983 and this is partly due to the tremendous carry-over from the arcades. Additionally, these games contained exciting elements of their own, the former a mesmerizing attraction to the frog's situation, the latter a fast-paced, space shoot-em-up with extraordinary left to right scrolling and state-

come relief from today's headlines and from such movies such as *Testament* and *The Day After*.

The entire Infocom line has been enormously successful and 1983 witnessed the *Zork* trilogy, *Deadline*, *Suspended*, *Witness* and *Starcross*. The Infocom line is made up of pure prose/text adventures and this five-year old privately held company out of Cambridge, MA, which was founded and is masterminded by former MIT students is the undisputed text/prose recreational computer software leader. Safe to say that other software companies will debut text adventures in 1984 in order to tap into this lucrative seeming genre. It may take some time, though, for other

pect include:

—More "do it yourself-type" programs. Examples might include *Arcade Machine* and *Lode Runner* (Broderbund), *Pinball Construction Set* (Electronic Arts) and *Mr. Robot And His Robot Friends* (Datamost).

—More inventive and innovative game play coupled with state-of-the-art graphics and sound. Such new techniques as Synapse's *Altered Perspective Scrolling* in *Dimension X* may be emulated.

—Packaging for entertainment products will become even more attractive and eye-catching.

—As the machine base grows, entertainment computer software may see its first real wave of television advertising.

—More multi-player, interactive participatory games in the style of *M.U.L.E.* (Electronic Arts) or *Murder By The Dozen* (CBS Software).

Of course, an entertainment computer software "hit" from a purely business point of view varies and is machine dependent. These days about 25,000 unit sales is considered a "hit" on the Apple, while 80,000 is the magic mark for such machines as Atari and Commodore.

One last thought. 1984 may also see more segmenting into certain types of recreational programs. At present there are a number of entertainment titles such as *Computer War* (Thorn EMI), *B-1 Nuclear Bomber* (Avalon Hill), *Combat Leader* (Strategic Simulations), *Operation Whirlwind* (Broderbund) and others; Hayden's chess games *Sargon II*; Gamestar's *Star League Baseball*; and *Flight Simulator* (Microsoft) and *Flight Simulator II* (Sublogic) that might suggest that flight (or other vehicle) simulation programs; sports; war and strategy games, and even other types of vertical games might flower in 1984. As this maturing segment of the market further crowds up, and as it develops a sense of history which illuminates "proven winners," it is likely that this trend will continue. Who won't try to build a better mousetrap, when mousetraps are selling like crazy?

—Jim McCullaugh

Entertainment software is expected to rise in market share and may climb as high as 40 percent in the space of four years with education coming on fast as well.

of-the-art graphics. It's safe to assume that 1984 will also see a few successful arcade to computer translations—possibly *Pac Man Jr.* or *Pole Position II*.

Shamus benefited from a fast-action, arcade-style approach but contained a compelling mapping feature as well. *Miner 2049er* was a clever variation on the fabulously successful *Donkey Kong* theme but featured many more levels. One potent reason offered for this game's success was the fact that the game didn't so much beat the player as the player beat himself.

Choplifter was one of the rare breed of instant classics that seemed to strike a responsive chord from everyone who played it. The program featured horizontal scrolling, a flying vehicle (helicopter), high resolution and simulated 3-D graphics. But perhaps its strongest allure was the fact that it was such an obvious about face to the typical shoot-em-up. In this program, the point is to rescue and save people—not kill them. One industry observer goes so far as to suggest that this program is a wel-

companies to come up to speed with Infocom. The firm writes programs on a huge DEC 2060 mainframe and also has a program which downloads it on multiple home system formats. The fact that Infocom releases product on multiple hardware formats, combined with their novel niche in the market, gives them a substantial unit and dollar volume edge. Other attractive elements about Infocom, according to trade observers: the enormous vocabulary recognition and high degree of interactivity. In fact, some companies use Infocom games for their executives as a means of educating them to computers. And in the final analysis, as one retailer puts it, no amount of graphics, no matter how exciting or state-of-the-art, can substitute for one's imagination based on prose or text. Infocom also has a substantial repeat customer business.

1984 trends

While "playability" will remain a key "make it or break it" element for recreational/computer software, some other trends the trade can ex-

You are in a dark cavern, trapped inside a tiny room. The thief has taken everything you own, stripping you of your treasures and your weapons and leaving you with only a small brass lantern. He slashes you with a razor-sharp stiletto. Wounded, you fall into a corner.

The thief moves in and delivers the lethal blow. He even steals your lamp as he withdraws, leaving you to die in the dark...

Fortunately, your resurrection is inevitable, because this scenario is one of thousands possible in "Zork," one of an emerging style of computer games called, perhaps pretentiously, "interactive fiction." Interactive fiction and its sisters, strategic simulations and role-playing fantasy games, are redefining the meaning of the term "computer games."

Unlike arcade shoot-'em-ups, the new breed is played without joysticks or hysteria. In fact, several of the most popular ones don't have any pictures at all — just text.

The new games don't last just a few minutes. They can take weeks to complete, with the computer saving the player's place between sessions. Nor are they merely designed for adolescents with twitchy wrists. They are for adults with long attention spans who take notes and leisurely ponder strategy.

The new games are for thinkers and dreamers. They present complex logical puzzles, historical dilemmas, and, at their very best, aspire to become mini-novels in which the players are active characters.

And the games are sweeping the country.

In a list published by First Software Inc., one of the nation's largest computer-program distributors, nine of the top 15 games in the country, including the No. 1 seller, are non-arcade games.

Non-arcade games fall into three categories: adventure, text games that place a player in a setting with little or no graphics; and

The DIABOLIC SCREEN TEST

By
ROBERT S. CAUTHORN
The Arizona Daily Star



if a person were to make the same decisions that were actually made, the game's outcome would be identical to the historical outcome, Krogel said.

However, pitted against the computer general, players can explore virtually limitless possibilities in the simulated conflicts.

Fantasy games are a hybrid of the text adventures and arcade games. A small portion of the screen is devoted to a graphic display of the scenario, with the rest of the screen listing the status of the game's characters and the player's options.

The fantasies allow the player to create characters by inventing names, intelligence, strengths and so on, and form a party of characters, which, to survive, has to conquer foes, transact business, eat and sleep.

However, the drawback to these games is that the commands are limited to one word or one character.

A recently released fantasy game, "Exodus: Ultima III," by Origin Systems Inc. was the hottest-selling game last Christmas at Simutek computers, 4897 E. Speedway, said John Gariepy, manager of the store's software department.

Bruce Subeck, manager of Computerland, 6177 E. Broadway, said his sales of the non-arcade games also are rising rapidly. The sophisticated new games appeal to an older audience that wants more challenge than arcade games offer, he said.

Gariepy, who says he has beaten virtually every game on the market, feels the action and graphics of fantasy games are the wave of the future.

"As far as I'm concerned, text is really boring," he said.

This view is not shared by Paul Friedland, one of the experts at Datagame, 1010 E. Speedway, who said Infocom's "Zork" changed his life.

On the first night Friedland spent in Tucson, two years ago, he left the YMCA, where he was staying, and went for a walk. Even though he had no experience with computers, he was intrigued when, on a whim, he stepped into Datagame.

"They showed me a game called 'Zork' and I've been hooked ever since," Friedland said.

He has become so good at the games that he was recently crowned a "professional gamer" by "Softline," a computer-games magazine. His interest in the games prompted Friedland to learn programming, and he is now a free-lance computer consultant.

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Non-arcade games fall into three categories: adventure, text games that place a player in a setting with little or no graphics; strategic, with limited graphics that either re-create historic military confrontations or pose future ones; and fantasy, which basically are computerized versions of the popular Dungeons and Dragons, in which players invent their own characters and move through a series of computer-generated scenes. The player of any of these games controls the action by typing instructions on the computer keyboard.

"People really are looking for more complicated, non-arcade games," said Linda Lawrence, marketing coordinator for Infocom Inc., the maker of "Zork." The company produces only text games, relying on vivid description, complex problems and sophisticated player interaction to keep the games interesting.

Infocom, based in Massachusetts, is unique in that its games will accept full-sentence commands, rather than the two-word orders employed by other games.

This is accomplished by the development of a highly advanced "parser"—the portion of the program that translates what the user types on the keyboard into terms that can be understood by the computer—which has a 700-word vocabulary and can even account for several meanings for a single word, Lawrence said.

"We feel very close to the book industry," Lawrence said. Traditional computer

A brief guide to several of the non-arcade computer games available:

• **Zork I:** This is one of the first and best-loved of all the adventure games. The player must enter a dungeon and recover the 20 treasures hidden there. In order to accomplish this, the player must first overcome a variety of adversaries and solve logical—and occasionally illogical—puzzles. Zork is one of the more difficult text games. (Infocom Inc. \$49.95)

• **Exodus: Ultima III:** A fantasy/role-playing game. Exodus: Ultima III is the current vogue among gamers. The players create a group of four characters that they

programmers are not writing. Infocom games, the 5-year-old company's principal authors include a physicist, a novelist, a political scientist, an architectural engineer and a doctor.

"We have the capability of working with outside authors," Lawrence added. "We are completing such a project right now."

Infocom's text games quickly draw players into their imaginary worlds by presenting complicated puzzles and, lately, complex characters that the player must deal with. The earlier text games moved rapidly from one problem to the next as the story unfolded around the player's decisions—they were "plot-oriented."

Infocom's newer games, however, place more emphasis on description of the scene and development of the characters in the text.

will guide through the complex adventure.

The game has color graphics and accepts simple commands. In this game, one of the best of its type, players of Exodus: Ultima III must find gold, purchase weapons, eat and sleep to survive. The excitement of these games is sometimes diminished by their somewhat primitive player interaction. (Origen Systems Inc., \$34.95)

• **Battle for Normandy:** A strategic game for one or two players. Battle for Normandy faithfully re-creates the pivotal Allied invasion of World War II. The player controls the American and British forces

PLAYERS IN THE CAST OF COMPUTER GAME SCENARIOS

Star illustration by Mark Friedland

Since the ground-breaking "Adventure," written by programmers for mainframe computers in the late '60s, sources for all-text games have been culled from genre fiction. The most popular themes are science fiction, fantasy and mysteries, in which the player is a detective who must gather evidence, interrogate witnesses—who can get upset or lie if the tone of the questions is wrong—and finally, it is hoped, get a conviction.

Military and civilian war-gamers, on the other hand, were responsible for computer-operated military simulations. The simulations were an outgrowth of the traditional board-played war games, with the computer handling all the calculations and regulations that once filled book-length rulebooks.

"War games on the computer can provide you with solitaire play," as opposed to

the multiple players required by board games, said Chuck Krogel, director of research and development at California-based Strategic Simulations Inc., which pioneered the field with its "Computer Bismarck."

"You don't have the headaches (of the board games), the computer games are fun," Krogel said. "You set the stage and you allow the players to determine the outcome."

All the games are designed to depict the real world as closely as possible, both in terms of historical accuracy and capabilities of the forces and weapons portrayed, Krogel said.

The screens of these games scroll across a map of a battlefield, illustrating the deployment of forces and terrain.

The historical games are designed so that

ready high standards, and the problems are beguiling.

Abandoned at an archaeological dig in the Egyptian desert by native workers, the player must first find and enter a buried pyramid. Once inside, the player must uncover the mystery of the pyramid. In an extension of the genre, Infocom, which enhances its games with innovative packaging, provides an actual map and a snatch of translated hieroglyphics that must be used to solve the mystery.

• **Planetfall:** The player is dutifully swabbing the interior of the space freighter Feinstein when the ship malfunctions.

This view is not shared by Paul Friedland, one of the experts at Datagame, 1010 E. Speedway, who said Infocom's "Zork" changed his life.

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"They showed me a game called 'Zork' and I've been hooked ever since," Friedland said.

He has become so good at the games that he was recently crowned a "professional gamer" by "Softline," a computer-games magazine. His interest in the games prompted Friedland to learn programming, and he is now a freelance computer consultant.

"There's a lot of imagination needed to play the games," he said of the text adventures. "They're a combination of literature and board games."

Nevertheless, two fantasies, "Exodus: Ultima III" and "Wizardry," are the most popular with players at Datagame, Friedland said. The Datagame gamers are becoming known in the industry as among the

best in the country and have beaten some new games in six days.

"'Wizardry' is to computer games what the Beatles were to rock 'n' roll," Friedland said.

The games can be played by the hour at public-access computer outlets such as Datagame, or at home—but they can be an expensive proposition for the home-user. The programs range in price from \$30 to \$60, assuming that one already has a home computer, which is another \$600 at least.

To compound matters, not all games can be played on all machines. The exception to this are Infocom games, which can be played on almost any computer with a disk drive.

But, once equipped, players should beware:

"'Zork' is an obsession," Friedland warns. "When they capture your imagination, that's it."

A sample screening of some of the non-arcade computer games

Escaping in an emergency pod, the player falls to a once-inhabited planet.

Whoever lived there met with a terrible calamity, and your mission is to discover what doom befell the inhabitants of the planet before you, too, suffer their fate. You are assisted in this enterprise by Floyd, a mischievous, 4-foot-tall robot who is the most delightfully memorable character ever to grace a computer screen.

This comical space adventure is ideal for beginners and amusing enough to keep the attention of more-experienced gamers. (Infocom Inc. \$49.95).

—Robert S. Caution



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FEB 2 1985

Planetfall is a text adventure game with ups and downs

By LOU HUDSON
Star-Telegram Writer

At last, you say, A computer game.

Yes. Assuming you can take science-fiction games, Planetfall is an excellent introduction to text games. It's pretty well a given that Infocom is at least among the elite text makers, and there's plenty of argument that it is *the* elite.

Planetfall is not falling-down easy. In fact, I haven't gotten all the way through it yet, but I'm close enough to know it's solvable (65 out of a possible 80 points, with only one major obstacle left to solve — actually, two, but one should lead to the other).

But those who can solve Zork II in their sleep may find this one a little elementary. That's why it's a good one to start on. Still, two other text addictees say Planetfall is good enough for regulars.

VideoPlay

(Planetfall, text adventure game by Infocom, 1984. Written by Steve Meretzky, who says it beats working for a living. Available for just about every home computer model around. List \$39.95. Par death count: 15 or so. Review copy provided by Take It Home Video, Fort Worth).

too.

So what's left to say?

A couple of things:

Planetfall is a game that has highs and lows. You can stumble around for a while, solving various tasks easily enough to keep your interest up. Then you may hit a long dry spell when nothing seems to work.

The key to the game is to take advantage of the former while gritting your teeth through the latter.

Every game has to have a gimmick, and this one's is a pesky robot named Floyd with a corny

sense of humor that includes such things as "Floyd lowers his voice and tells you the latest rumors about Dr. Zronkin," or someone like that.

Floyd follows you wherever you go in this game and generally becomes a bother (but an indispensable bother, as it turns out).

A word about text games in general:

(Actually, that was a fib. It's going to be a lot more than "a word.")

There are a couple of complaints around that text games are boring because there's nothing pretty to look at on the screen. Well, if that's your case, you ain't got no imagination.

What limited exposure I've had to graphic text games is disappointing. What's on the screen isn't nearly as neat (or as horrible) as what I can conjure up in my mind to fit the situation.

And text-only games can make use of all that space on the disk and in computer memory for all sorts of variety, complexity, fun and what have you because it doesn't have to provide for the K-gobbling graphics.

Planetfall puts you on a virtually abandoned planet (You fall there from a crippled ship, see? Get it? Get it? Fall to planet. Planet fall. See?) and leaves you to your own devices to explore a mysterious complex and contend with various crises along the way.

This one is about a 15-deather, meaning that without saving the situation an inordinate number of times, you can make it through without dying more than 10-15 times.

Obviously, you need to, save your position to disk from time to time — that's SOP. But be careful not to save your situation just when you are about to die of hun-

ger or about to be gobbled up by some monster. The time to save is a few steps back so you'll have time to change your strategy next time after you go away into the great beyond.

Despite the fact you'll miss seeing another sunrise a few times, this is not a violence-studded game in general. You are left to your wits to solve different problems, most of which don't involve your strangulation or dissolving or consumption by another. They are technical and machinery-fixing problems.

There is a constant time pressure of a sort, and this game keeps time in days, forcing you to sleep occasionally (as well as eat).

But it never requires you to go to the john, although there are such facilities sprinkled around the compound.

As is also SOP on text games, you have to draw you off a map to

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As is also SOP on text games, you have to draw you off a map to

keep track of where you are as well as other things. And note where you drop off various items also, because you'll likely need them again.

And watch your score. Sometimes it gives you a hint if you are heading in the right direction. (But not always. Sometimes you get points for valiant, but useless, efforts).

Being as how this is the first review on a text game, I'm reluctant to assign it a score. But it's going to rank ahead of a lot of others, and will serve as a judging standard for awhile. I think I may like Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy slightly better, strictly for its off-the-wall humor, but this one's still close.

(Questions on video games? Send them to VideoPlay, Fort Worth Star-Telegram, P.O. Box 1870, Fort Worth 76101, and I'll try to get them answered.)

1985, Fort Worth Star-Telegram



PARIS, TX
NEWS

D. 14,000 — S. 15,000

DEC 7 1985

Megabytes By Bill Lamb

Don't get smart, Planetfall can handle you wise guys

By the time I shot down my 10,000th invading space ship, it dawned on me that no one had yet bothered to stretch the entertainment potential of the home computer to its limits.

That was quite a while back, and things are beginning to change for the better.

THERE I WAS, quietly swabbing the deck and trying my best to avoid being noticed by my supervisor, Ensign Blather. Blather, you see, is not a nice guy. Actually, I'd call him pompous and overbearing, overcome with a sense of importance.

I should have known it was not going to be my day when that alien ambassador slid down the hall spreading slime all over my freshly cleaned deck. Had I realized that, I probably would have expected the explosion that rocked the ship a moment later.

Being a careful type of guy, I made for the nearest escape pod. As the hatch closed behind me, I heard more explosions from deep within the ship. I had no sooner gotten myself strapped in than the pod was ejected.

I could see the pod's computer searching for some habitable place to land, and it wasn't long before the pod crashed into the ocean of some unknown planet. The crash caused an inside panel to open, displaying a survival kit and a towel.

I don't know why, but I grabbed both and made for the door as waves began lapping at the porthole. Fighting against the rush of water after opening the hatch, I made my way to the surface and climbed out.

To my amazement, I was at the bottom of a flight of stairs carved out of stone. Up I climbed, eventually finding myself in the ruins of a courtyard. Debris was everywhere, and there were passages leading in many directions.

I immediately began exploring — the obvious thing to do. But I quickly starved to death.

I had scored only six points.

THE GAME is *Planetfall*, just one in a series of text adventures being produced by Infocom.

It's called a text adventure because there are no spectacular computer graphics worked into the game. In fact, there are *no* graphics involved in the game. None.

Remember your favorite novel? You consumed every word of it to the extent you visualized the people, places and events and, in a way, became a part of the story.

Infocom's principle is the same.

In *Planetfall*, you are the central character. You decide what to do and how and when to do it. It's a novel in computer form with you as the hero. Its outcome — survival or death — depends totally on your actions.



your mind. You can't help but visualize your surroundings, which, like a novel, gives you a sense of being there. And you *must* use your imagination.

As you solve the puzzles you'll probably chide yourself for not thinking of the solutions earlier. They're both simple and difficult.

You move through the game by telling the program what you are doing. You move by directions; you don't move left, you move east, for example.

The literature points out some basic commands the program understands: look, examine, search, attack, point, pick up, put, place. But there are some others, I've discovered. Even the literature hints at some secret commands that get great results. Wish I had them.

Now, for a bit of warning. If you think you can get smart with *Planetfall*, you're wrong. *Planetfall* recognizes certain ... well, key words, let me say. And the program will respond accordingly.

Such language from an ensign in the *Stellar Patrol*.

Once, while pondering my next action, I absent-mindedly typed in: Well, what next? *Planetfall* responded: *Do you talk to yourself often?* Not to be outdone, I typed: Yes. *Planetfall's* response to that?

or stairs carved out of stone. Up I climbed, eventually finding myself in the ruins of a courtyard. Debris was everywhere, and there were passages leading in many directions.

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Now, friends, *that* is a game.

THE GAME begins as I've written. But it's definitely possible to die before you get off the ship. So far I've found two ways to do that.

First, you can fail to make for the escape pod. It's a new game, so you might not realize how this thing is going to work. You don't pay attention to the narrative description of your surroundings and can't find the pod, or you just fail to realize that's what you're supposed to do.

Planetfall will let you know: *You have died.*

Or you might try my slick move. Blather confronted me and started chewing me out for sloppily cleaning the deck. I took a poke at the smart-mouthed little ensign.

He proceeded to remove one or two of my limbs and several of my internal organs.

You have died.

Eventually, you will get off the ship and land on that watery planet. The rest of the story is up to you, in many ways.

I'm not going to give away the farm here. It wouldn't be fair. And besides, I've yet to score more than 26 points, so I don't have that much of the farm to give you. (Infocom says a winning score is 80.)

There's the complex I mentioned, much like an old castle in some ways. There are doors, locked and unlocked. You, of course, have no keys.

There are hallways and dead ends. There are places you must go, places you can't and places you shouldn't. There are also places you must go, but don't know about.

There is also a robot — which you may or may not find. His name is Floyd, and the package says he's the best companion you could have. That's a bunch of Martian trash. So far, all he's done is beg me to play hide and seek with him, color on the walls with an old Crayon, relate some useless story about an old robot buddy of his and then dash off to who-knows-where when he gets bored.

Tell him to do something useful and he either doesn't know what you're talking about or changes the subject.

I finally got fed up and kicked him. He went to the corner of the room and pouted. I tried to hit him once, and he started running around screaming how much he enjoyed playing tag. Exasperating.

The great thing about it is that he may yet prove to be worth his weight in scrap metal — if I'm just smart enough to figure out his secret.

The literature with the game — and there isn't much — indicates the player must save both himself and the planet. As yet, I don't know what kind of trouble the planet is in.

THE BEAUTY of *Planetfall* is that it exercises

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One night, after all the adventure I could take for one day, I decided to try a different method of quitting the game. I typed: Kill myself.

I figured this would really throw *Planetfall*.

Afraid not. *Planetfall* told me that was a really dumb idea, but it carried out the command. *Poof. You have died.*

End of game.

There are other remarks, but I won't mention them here.

THOUGH *Planetfall* is fun for children and adults, its premise gets a bit silly sometimes. For instance, the package contains a *Stellar Patrol* identification card, a diary our hero has kept while cruising the universe, and postcards from Accardi 3, Ramos II and Nebulon, home of the worm people.

I guess that's cute.

If you decide to stop, you can save the present game by putting it on disk. It was here that I found a flaw. *Planetfall* wouldn't save the game on the external drive of my Apple Macintosh.

Now for a few hints. Make food and water a top priority. *Planetfall* isn't kidding when it tells you you're so hungry you may pass out. I've bitten the stellar dust many times that way.

Stay away from dark places; they're not always empty.

Be bold. Try some off-the-wall commands. If they don't work, *Planetfall* will tell you.

Make yourself a map as you explore. It's an invaluable aid when you have to start over. And you will have to start over.

IF YOU FIND *Planetfall* too easy, take heart. According to Infocom's Spencer Steere, their games come in three levels. *Planetfall* is one of the standard-level games, along with *Enchanter*, *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy* and *Zork I*. Advanced games include *Suspect*, *A Mind Forever Voyaging*, *Zork II* and *Zork III*. Expert-level games include *Deadline* and *Spellbreaker*.

Ms. Speere said standard-level games take about 20 hours to solve. She added, however, that some people have worked on other Infocom games off and on for years.

Planetfall's smart answers to your dumb questions is "just a way of keeping (the game) lighthearted."

And it's doubtful, she said, that Infocom will ever produce graphics with its games. "If we depart from the text, it would be a totally different approach to the game," she said.

Planetfall is a wonderful game that takes the mind on a wild ride, exercising it every step of the way. It even has atmosphere.

It's available for most popular computers.

Home Computers

Books & Games

In past issues of *Citibusiness*, I reviewed a number of books written to simplify or to teach programming on the Atari home computer. There have been numerous tips, and shortcuts, and each book had its own reward to the would-be or advanced programmer. After spending a small fortune in buying all these books, I have now found THE book I should have bought (had it been available). Nevertheless it's here, and I'm more excited than ever. *Atari BASIC Faster and Better* by Cal Evans is changing my life.

Here is a book written by an extremely knowledgeable author, who got that way by making all the mistakes there were to make. The result is a comprehensive understanding of the workings of the world of Atari BASIC. Clearly written, it's the only reference book you'll ever need. And the bonus — soon to be released are three diskettes to be used in conjunction with the book, containing the major BASIC subroutines, machine language subroutines, assembly language source code, demo programs and application programs presented in the book.

The subroutines, utilities and USR routines can be made part of any program, making your BASIC program *Faster and Better*. The book is available now, the diskettes will be available in January.

A+ Volume 1, Issue 1 has arrived. Not many people knew it was coming, so it arrived without fanfare, looking for a corner in the Apple section of your favorite magazine.

...reviews by Gabe Torok

stand. If the first issue is any indication, it will find a cozy spot somewhere between *Apple Orchard* and *InCider*. Ziff-Davis Publishing has a hand in nearly half of all computer magazines sold in North America, and has proved the high quality and technical knowledge of its writers.

Lord British, the mastermind behind the *Ultima* series has done it again. *Ultima III - Exodus* is now available for the Apple and Atari home computers. *Ultima*, is an epic fantasy role-playing experience, with the latest version, *Ultima III*, featuring a roster of 20 characters with up to a party of four characters.

For those of you who remember Chuckles, (author of *Laspak*, *Lunar Leeper*, and *Jawbreaker*, (trademarks of Sierra On-Line Inc.), there is a new addictive arcade adventure for Apple and Atari — the *Caverns of Callisto*.

Dear Santa,

In the hope that this note will find you in time, I would like to explain why you will not find me at home Christmas Eve. You see, I saw a sign. It read:

"When the Third Galactic Union was formed by the Great Treaty of 11,203GY between the empires of Tremain and Gallium, an order went forth from the capital on Tremain that a great armada be formed. Thus was the Stellar Patrol born, and our mission ever since has been to explore the Galaxy, to seek out such remnants of human civilization as have managed to survive the Second Union's collapse and the Dark Age that followed.

"If you are the kind of organism who can stare 10,000 years of darkness straight in the visual receptor without flinching... if you can stand up to the horrors of star systems descended to near barbarism, where interstellar travel is non-existent, where human beings actually burn fossil fuels for energy, and have been known to grow food directly from exposed topsoil... then you may just have what it takes to

be part of our proud tradition.

"But you've got to be tough. Disciplined. Blindly loyal. So if you're the type of organism we're looking for, here's a great place to start."

So I bit and walked in, answered all the questions, signed a pre-printed form and got thoroughly hooked. So you see, Santa, when you arrive at my house this Christmas, I will be somewhere out there in the Galaxy, exploring the Universe. Whatever presents you may have brought, please leave them near the fireplace. I promise, I'll make it up to you next year. And sorry about not having a Christmas tree this year, but I had to leave rather suddenly.

Yours truly,
Gabe Torok

P.S. The program is called *PLANET-FALL* and it's by Infocom. Its humour, and unparalleled imagination will indeed keep everyone on the intergalactic road to adventure for months to come.

Booksellers

TOP 10 GAMES

1. *Holical Ace* — by MicroProse
2. *Lode Runner* — by Broderbund/Solo Flight — by MicroProse
3. *Miner 2049'er* — by Big Five/Reston
4. *Planetfall* — by Infocom
5. *Castle Wolfenstein* — by Muse
6. *Phetop* — by Epyx
7. *Pooyan* — by DataSoft
8. *Chapfiter* — by Broderbund
9. *Elchanter* — by Infocom
10. *Rally Speedway* — by Adventure International

TOP 5 HOME BUSINESSES PROGRAMS

1. *The Home Accountant* — by Continental
2. *Bank Street Writer* — by Broderbund
3. *The Home Word* — by Sierra On-Line
4. *FCM* — by Continental
5. *Utahlib* — by Continental

TOP 5 BOOKS

1. *Machine Language for Beginners* — by Compute Publications
2. *First Book of Commodore 64* — by Compute Publications
3. *Commodore 64 Exposed (formerly Commodore 64 Made Simple)* — by Melbourne
4. *The Book of Apple Software* — by The Book Co.
5. *The Great Book of Commodore 64 Games* — by Hotacker

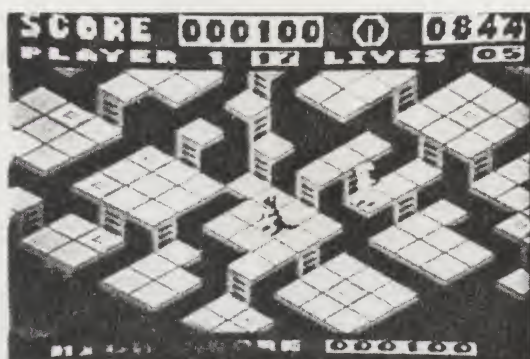
Gabe Torok is marketing and promotions manager for Microwest Distributing.

check out different rooms if they decide to split up. Each character flashes onscreen when it's his turn, and if you don't move fast enough you miss your turn.

Instead of looking down on the maze from above the way you do in *Temple of Apshai*, you face the walls and doors in this game. They're drawn with a three dimensional effect that imparts a better impression of actually being there.

Up to nine games can be saved in progress on the game disk, which is convenient. But you can't inventory the treasures you've found as you proceed. Also, there's no sound.

Datamost, for Apple

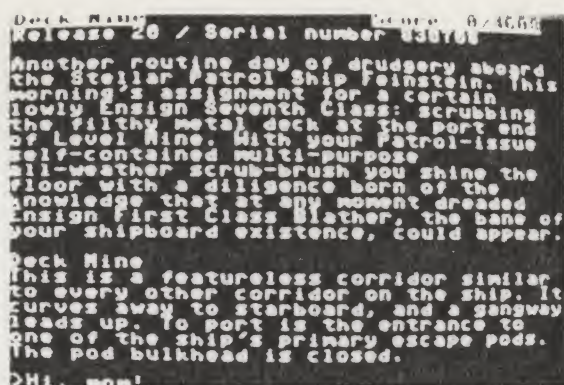


FLIP & FLOP

As *Pac-Man* popularized the maze game, *Q*Bert* introduced the "hop around and change things" game. Rather than just ripoff *Q*Bert*, First Star has borrowed that general idea and altered it enough to create a fresh, new, wonderful game. The biggest change is also the simplest, and we don't know why nobody thought of it sooner. On alternating waves, the entire field turns over and you have to play the game upside down! This unusual orientation requires a whole new set of skills.

Even without that feature, *Flip & Flop* is not *Q*Bert*. If you plan your moves carefully, you can lure the zookeeper to a square covered with flypaper. And if the zookeeper doesn't catch you, his net might. The 30 level game features bouncy circus music, animated intermissions, and colorful characters like Flip the Kangaroo and Mitch the Monkey. The game should be very popular with kids, but you can sneak downstairs and play it after they go to bed. *Q*Bert* was truly an original arcade game. But games like *Flip & Flop* and *Juice* (by Tronix, reviewed last issue) go beyond it.

First Star, for Atari computers



PLANETFALL

As a lowly Ensign 7th Class onboard a Stellar Patrol ship, all you have to do is scrub the deck—until disaster strikes and you're marooned on an uncharted planet. Mapping the mysterious pair of scientific complexes there isn't as hard as in many of Infocom's all-text adventures, and some problems are easier. Top score is 80, and you get "promotions" as your score increases. (But advancing past Planetary Commodore is a real braincrusher.)

The element that distinguishes *Planetfall* is that you must eat and sleep regularly—or die. This adds enormously to the "you are there" feel of the game, Steve Meretzky's first. Also, you get to *do* a lot: drive a subway, operate elevators and teleportational units, and even retrieve vital data from an alien computer. A warped sense of humor prevails. Hawaiian music "oozes" from the elevator, and Floyd, a laugh-a-minute robot, follows you around like a puppy. You'll sober up quickly, though, as the story unfolds and you realize what an interstellar jam you've stumbled into this time.

Infocom, for Atari, Apple, C-64, IBM PC, Osborne 1, CP/M, DEC Rainbow, TI Professional

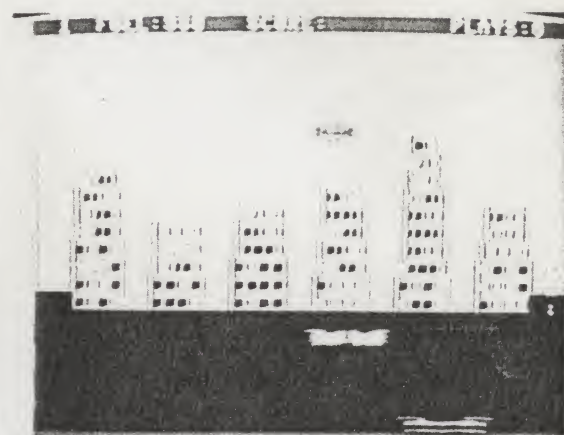


BUZZARD BAIT

Sometimes you can put *too* much in a game. *Buzzard Bait* looks like it started

out as a standard *Demon Attack* space game, but somebody said, "Hey, let's put in flying penguins, mines, and a completely different bonus screen." The animation is great and it's hysterical to watch the humans fall on their heads or get eaten by the baby birds, but the game doesn't make sense. Why do the penguins kill you in the game but just push you aside in the bonus round? Why do the humans walk out of the nests to their deaths? What kind of ship can jump halfway up the screen but can't fly? The animation tells an interesting little story, but the penguin and the unplayable bonus round don't seem to fit in anywhere. If a few of these extra added attractions had been removed, *Buzzard Bait* might have made a better—but very simple—little shoot-'em-up.

Sirius Software, for Apple



SAVE NEW YORK

Anybody can sing "*I Love New York*," but are you willing to have dogfights with alien space mutants to defend the Big Apple? In *SNY*, birdlike creatures come out of the sky and literally *eat* the New York skyline. You control a rocket ship that can roam the screen freely, firing lasers. If you don't hit a mutant fast enough, he will lay an egg and baby mutants will infest the subways beneath the city. You can land your ship and go after them on foot, but you may also get run over by the trains.

Save New York is a catchy shoot-'em-up that has some depth to it. Control of the ship is solid and the graphics are sharp and colorful. The aliens can fly *behind* the buildings. The lights twinkle like buildings full of workaholics flicking the switches on and off. It would have been nice if the field could scroll along the skyline, and we thought the image could have been enlarged by putting the above-ground segment and the

Enchanter, Planetfall.

Enchanter, Planetfall, by Infocom, 55 Wheeler St., Cambridge, MA, \$49.95 and \$59.95

One of the most successful games for the IBM-PC was *Zork* from Infocom. Since then, they have released several other games, the latest two of which are *Enchanter* and *Planetfall*. Like *Zork*, these are both text adventures in which the player explores a large series of rooms and passageways and, as with all Infocom games, commands are entered in a good approximation of normal English. While these two games are closer in spirit to the original *Zork* series than later games, there are some differences. Most obvious is the themes. *Enchanter* uses a fantasy theme in which magic plays a large role, while *Planetfall* is pure science fiction. In addition, *Enchanter* has a well defined goal, which makes for a much more playable game.

Enchanter, the newer of the two, takes the player into a world of magic. In it, he or she is a young magician sent to destroy an evil sorcerer. Unlike most other games of this type, the player cannot use a sword and simply cut and hack through to success. Instead, he must learn how to best use the new spells that he finds to defend himself and to solve the puzzles of the sorcerer's castle. It's challenging and the puzzles are quite good; not as difficult as in some other games and (to me at least) more fun. Particularly entertaining was the use of magic as a tool; the spells are not just one-shot specialized devices, but instead can be used in the same way as a rope or a hammer.

Unlike many other Infocom games, *Enchanter* has a well defined goal; the player must defeat the evil wizard. How to do this is, of course, not at all obvious. While wandering through a game solving puzzles and finding treasures is fun, having a goal to work towards makes *Enchanter* much more enjoyable. It's the difference between playing a practice hand of poker and playing to win.

The packaging of *Enchanter* is attractive, a flat box with a hole apparently torn out of the front, intended to look like an ancient relic of some sort. The instructions are well done, and should require no further explanation from the dealer.

The other game, *Planetfall*, is a sort of tongue in cheek version of *Starcross*. As a very junior ensign on a starship, the player must first survive the destruction of his ship and then save the planet he lands on from destruction. Along the way he meets Floyd, a not-too-bright robot, who adds yet another touch of madness to the game. The puzzles are tough, and this is a bit more difficult than *Enchanter*, but it is still an enjoyable game. Customers who liked *Starcross* or *Suspended* should enjoy *Planetfall* as well.

The package for *Planetfall* is a delight, and probably worth the price of the game. It includes an identity card and manual (both complete with security warnings), postcards from far-off places and a half-written diary. The only thing missing is a secret decoder ring.

Infocom has said that it will shortly be releasing some playing aids for its products, possibly including clues for solving the puzzles as well as maps and posters. These should be well received by those tormented souls

who, like me, just cannot solve some of the puzzles.

Rogue

Rogue, AI Design Systems, P.O. Box 3685, Santa Clara, CA 95055, \$44.95, for IBM PC with 128K and UNIX systems

One of the nicest surprises I found when I first started using a UNIX system was a game called *Rogue*. It was challenging, required thought and not just reflexes, got harder as you played longer, and changed from game to game. I've since played *Rogue* on several UNIX installations and enjoy it as much now as the first time I played it. Like *Zork*, it is incredibly popular among mainframe and mini-computer users.

Rogue is an adventure game in which the object is to obtain the fabled Amulet of Yendor. The game is played in a series of rooms and corridors which are displayed using character graphics. During the game, a player finds treasures, weapons, and magical items, and must use them to overcome the monsters which infest the dungeon.

So far, this sounds like any of a dozen similar games, but *Rogue* has a few twists which have contributed to its popularity. First, the monsters are not passive; they will chase you until they catch you, they'll gang up on you, and if you hide they'll come looking for you. Next, *Rogue* changes from game to game. There is not a fixed map to be memorized, it is always different. In addition, the names and descriptions of the magical items also changes; what was a healing potion last game may now be poison. This makes each game a new challenge and keeps it from

getting stale as other games tend to after they've been played for a while. To keep this from becoming too tough, the computer does keep an accurate record of what you have discovered, and displays a map of what you have seen.

All in all, *Rogue* is a lot of fun. It's not quite as mindless as a video arcade game, and not as mentally challenging as some puzzle games; just a pleasant way to relax in the middle of the day. Since many IBM-PCs are being used for business, it also has the nice feature of instantly clearing the screen and displaying the DOS prompt when a single key is pressed.

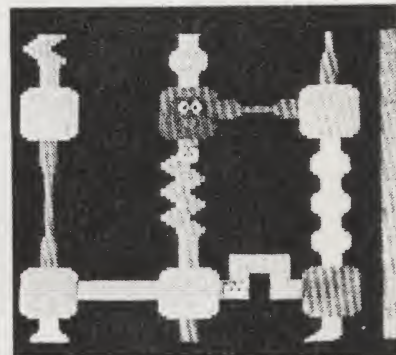
While it's hard to predict a game's popularity, *Rogue* has managed to attract a very large following among UNIX users and I think it will do quite well on the IBM-PC.

Jeff Spahn

OTHER RELEASES

Animated Exploration

Alf is a big-eyed little character journeying through a maze of colorful tunnels in *Alf in the Color Caves* from Spinnaker Software on cartridge for the



Atari and Commodore 64 available this month.

Accompanied by sound effects, Alf relies on the player's joystick to travel

40 GAMES

Astrochase: In this first-rate shoot-'em-up-in-space, you can fly in one direction and fire your lasers in another to defend earth. Brilliant graphics, great animation. (First Star)

Baseball: An all-new game designed specifically for the PCjr, *Baseball* features an aerial view when the ball is pitched and hit. It's a two-player game with full control over your individual team members. (Imagic)

Boulder Dash: Dig your way through 16 action-packed caves in your search for treasure. Colorful scrolling screens and an intermission game make this a real contender. (First Star)

Bristles: Our April "Game of the Month," *Bristles* offers arcade-type fun as you paint the rooms of eight houses—despite Brenda the Brat, bucket-chuckers and other obstacles. Music from the Nutcracker Suite makes this lively entertainment. (First Star)

Bruce Lee: As the mighty kung-fu fighter, you must defeat the deadly Ninja and other enemies as you break into the Evil Wizard's fortress to ransack his fortune. Strategy as well as reflexes are necessary for victory. (Datasoft)

Buck Rogers: A translation of the intense arcade shoot-'em-up. You pilot a ship as it zooms forward on a pylon-filled landscape. Stay within the pylons and kill the weird creatures that are buzzing around you. (Sega)

Congo Bongo: Another arcade translation—*Zaxxon* meets *Donkey Kong* and *Jungle King*. Climb this three-dimensional cliff and avoid the rocks, monkeys, and crocodiles to humiliate a gorilla. (Sega)

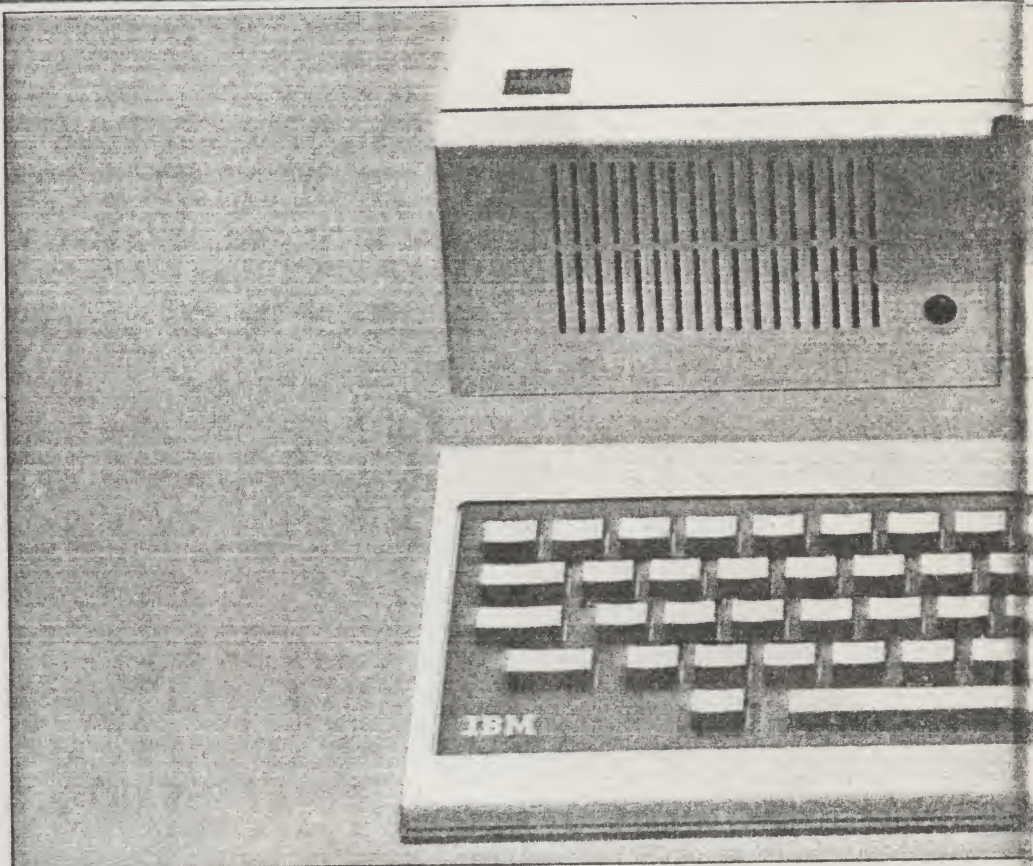
Crossfire: This shoot-'em-up takes place inside a maze that represents an aerial view of a city under alien attack. Mile-a-minute action's the reason it won our Golden Joystick Award as "Best Action Game of 1982." (Sierra On-line)

Deadline: If you haven't heard of this one, you *must* be dead. It's an all-text adventure in which you play the role of detective to solve a murder. (Infocom)

Demon Attack: *Space Invaders* to the max. Wave after wave of swooping aliens want nothing more than to drop something vile on you. In each round they are slightly different. (Imagic)

Drelbs: No lasers here. Your Drelb builds up glowing squares, while the enemy tries to knock them down. If you're looking for something out of the ordinary, give this one a shot. (Synapse)

Enchanter: The first of a trilogy that's like a magical version of *Zork*. Explore an evil magician's castle, learn to use your spells and rid the land of black magic. All-text, all-fun. (Infocom)



Facemaker: Kids from 3-8 will enjoy creating faces on the screen by selecting different features and moving them onto a blank face. Great for introducing youngsters to things like menus, cursors and the keyboard. (Spinnaker)

Flip & Flop: As in *Q*Bert*, you've got to jump on each block to move to the next round. But you've got to play that round upside-down! Gorgeous graphics and cute characters. (First Star)

Football: Another new sports game, *Football* lets you act as coach and pick the play, then execute it as a player. Can be played against the computer or head-to-head. (Imagic)

Genesis: A hi-res shoot-'em-up that has you playing the part of a deadly scorpion who's fighting it out with hordes of venomous spiders. (Datasoft)

In The Chips: Be the boss of a Silicon Valley software firm, and learn how to run a real business while winning the game by wiping out the competition in this entertaining and educational simulation. (Creative)

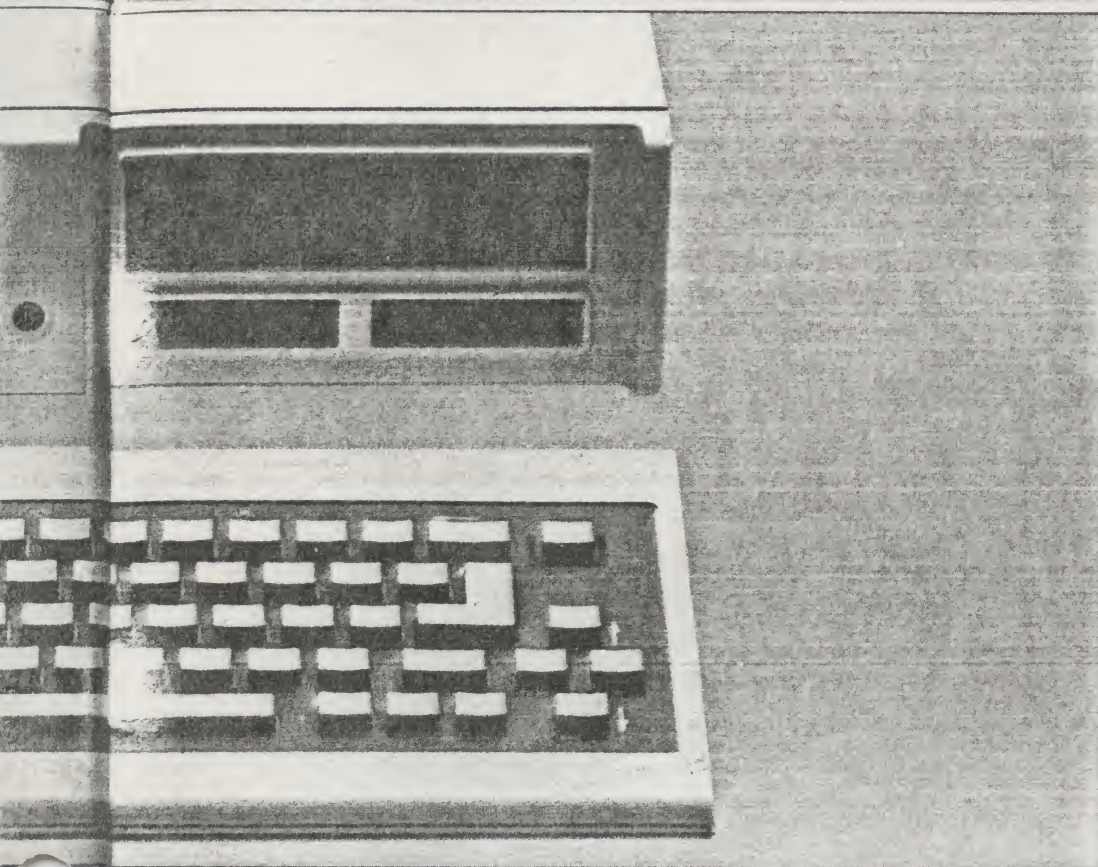
Infidel: An all-text adventure, *Infidel* drops you off in the desert to find and explore a mysterious pyramid of a lost Queen of the Nile. (Infocom)

Jawbreaker: A maze game with moving walls. You're a set of teeth, devouring different kinds of candy. Sounds like kid stuff, but real strategy is required. (Sierra On-line)

Juno First: An arcade classic that can be played by one or two. Lasers, aliens, and a space ship you can fly through time and space. (Datasoft)

Lost Tomb: An adaptation of the arcade game, this ani-

FOR PCJR



mated adventure takes place in an ancient Egyptian tomb that's teeming with deadly mummies and other dangers. There are 91 chambers in the maze. (Datasoft)

Math Maze: Addition, subtraction, multiplication and division become fun when worked into a maze game scenario. Nice animation and sound effect, and you can create your own mazes. (Designware)

Microsurgeon: The screen is the inside of a human body, and you've got to kill cancers and save blood cells so the patient will get well. It's just like *Fantastic Voyage*, but without Raquel Welch. (Imagic)

Mr. Cool: Like *Q*Bert*, Mr. Cool has to hop around changing the color of the "plates" he lands on. Similar pyramid, but the enemy flies past horizontally instead of chasing you. (Sierra On-line)

Nibbler: Fast-moving action maze along the lines of *Lady Bug*, but as each second ticks away, the body of your snake gets longer. A translation of the little-known arcade game. (Datasoft)

Oil's Well: A unique maze-type game in which you drill for oil with a long pipe that stretches to the bottom of the screen. As much fun and as addictive as *Pac-Man*. (Sierra)

Picnic Paranoia: Swat the ants, spiders and wasps before they make off with your picnic. Sharp graphics and animation, five skill levels and solitaire/two-player versions make this a real value. (Synapse)

Pipes: Arlo the plumber has to connect pipes from the water supply to a number of houses, but only has so much

money to buy supplies. Animated action teaches skills involving relative distance and economics. (Creative)

Planetfall: A laugh-a-minute robot named Floyd follows you everywhere in this all-text sci-fi adventure. If you've never played an Infocom game, *Planetfall*'s the best introduction to their mini-universes—challenging and fun, but not as difficult and as the others. (Infocom)

Puzzlemania: Logic, concentration, powers of observation, sound recognition and trial and error all play a part in solving the 50 video puzzles that make up this game. At the higher levels, you even have to figure out what the problems are. (Epyx)

Save New York: Fly through NYC's skies to shoot down the alien spiders, then guide your little character underground so he can blast them in the subway tunnels—if he doesn't get run down by a train! (Creative)

Seastalker: An all-text adventure designed for 8-13 year-olds, *Seastalker* puts you in charge of a mini-sub and challenges you to rescue an underwater research lab from denizens of the deep. (Infocom)

Shamus: This incredibly fast-paced and frenetic shoot-'em-up-in-a-maze game won our "Golden Joystick" award as Best Computer Game of 1982.

Spellakazam: Over 400 words from the widely used Silver Burdett spelling program are incorporated into an animated scenario for grades 2-8. It allows you to make up your own word lists. (Designware)

Starcross: Explore an alien spaceship that's full of strange life forms from around the universe, then repair the ship before they—and you—die. (Infocom)

Star Trek: An authentic conversion of the arcade game. Split-screens show long-range and close-up views of the *Enterprise* battling Klingon ships. (Sega)

Suspended: The only all-text adventure in which you control the actions of a band of robots, manipulating them to put your underground cryogenic bunker back together before it's too late. (Infocom)

Ultima II: An animated action-adventure full of strange characters and mythical beasts who seek to thwart your quest. (Sierra On-line)

Witness: Set in 1938 Los Angeles, this Raymond Chandler-esque mystery defies you to solve a murder that takes place while you're talking to the victim. All-text, and not as difficult as *Deadline*. (Infocom)

Zork I, II, III: The classic all-text adventure game, this trilogy is set in the subterranean world of Zork, inhabited by trolls, magicians and other fantastic creatures who make life tough as you attempt to collect various treasures. (Infocom)

SCREENING ROOM

S T R A T E G Y

LODE RUNNER

Broderbund Software

AP (disk), AT (disk), C 64
(disk & cart.), IBM PC (disk),
VIC (cart.).

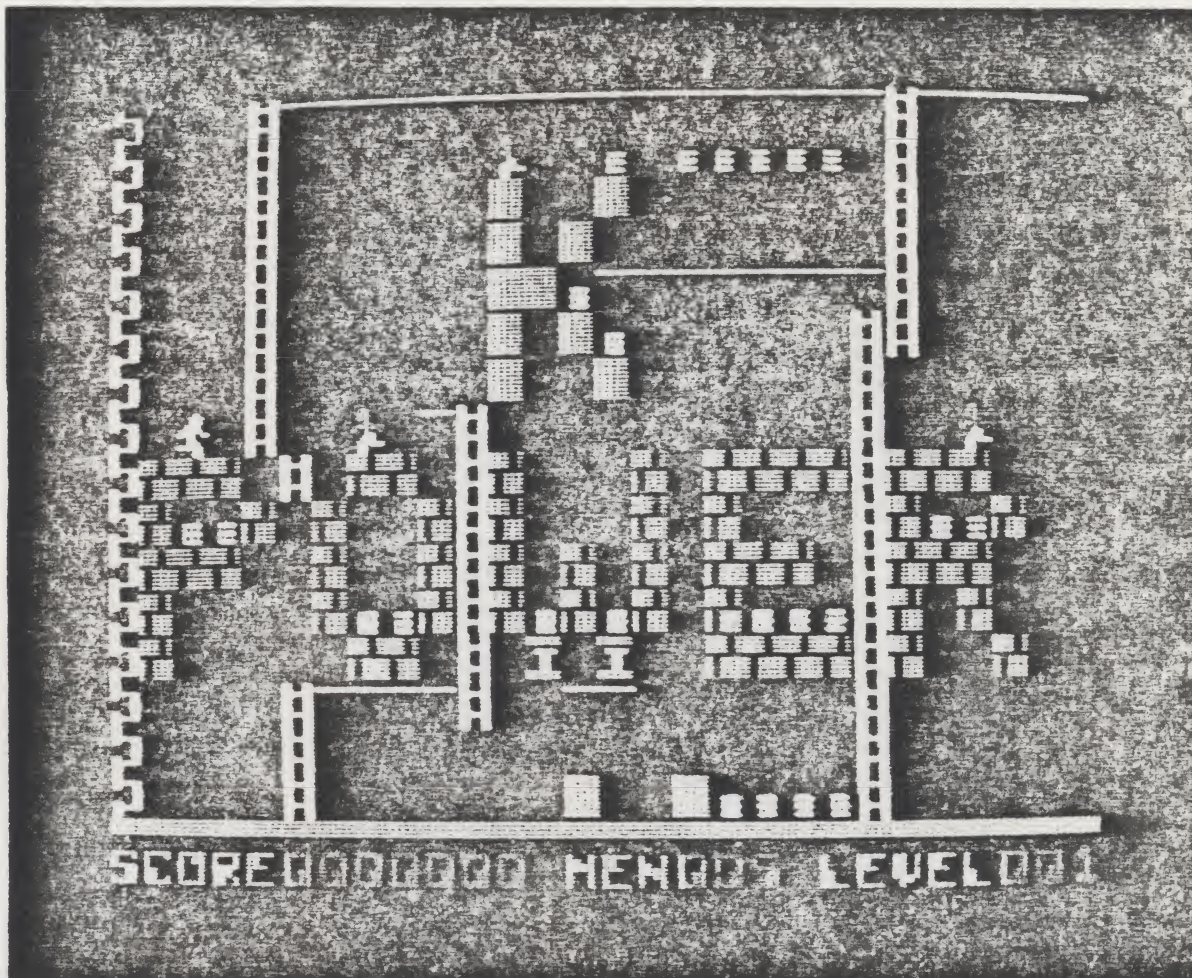
Product Info: (415) 479-1170

TYPE: Climbing arcade with
build-it-yourself options

IN BRIEF: Venture into enemy ter-
ritory and retrieve gold chests
scattered in mazes of bricks, lad-
ders, pipes, and trapdoors as
guards doggedly pursue you.

Though crammed with 150
levels, the game also offers the
option to make your own. I de-
signed the homemade level
shown here to put lode runners
of any skill level to the test. Just
duplicate the symbols using the
Game Generator (EDIT mode).

—DAVID LANGENDOEN



Screen Shot: William Gallagher

Climb your way through K-POWER.

PLANETFALL

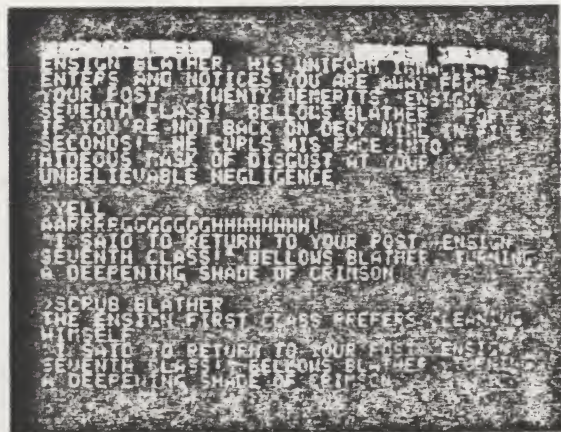
Infocom, Inc.

AP, AT, C 64, IBM PC/PCjr, TI,
TRS-80 I/III (all disk).

Product Info: (617) 492-1031

TYPE: Text adventure

IN BRIEF: You're a lowly member
of the prestigious Stellar Patrol,
but life isn't as glamorous as
you'd expected. As the game be-
gins, you find yourself scrubbing
floors under the scrutiny of a sa-
distic ensign. After an odd series



of events, you wind up on a de-
serted planet. But why is the
planet deserted? And what do
you do while you're there? For
clues, read on....

— The brig isn't the best
place to be during an explosion,
but the escape pod is.

— The WAIT (or "Z") com-
mand is very helpful. Don't ne-
glect it.

— Once you get to the ruins,
one of your first priorities will
be to find the Kitchen Access
card. Without it, you'll die when
the food from your survival kit
runs out.

— You can't get to the
game's "best" ending unless you
fix the Communications Sys-
tems. Make this one of the first
stops on your list.

— Don't try to carry every-

thing you find; many items are
designed to distract you. There's
a limit to how much you can car-
ry, so take only what seems im-
portant. You can always go back
for anything you missed.

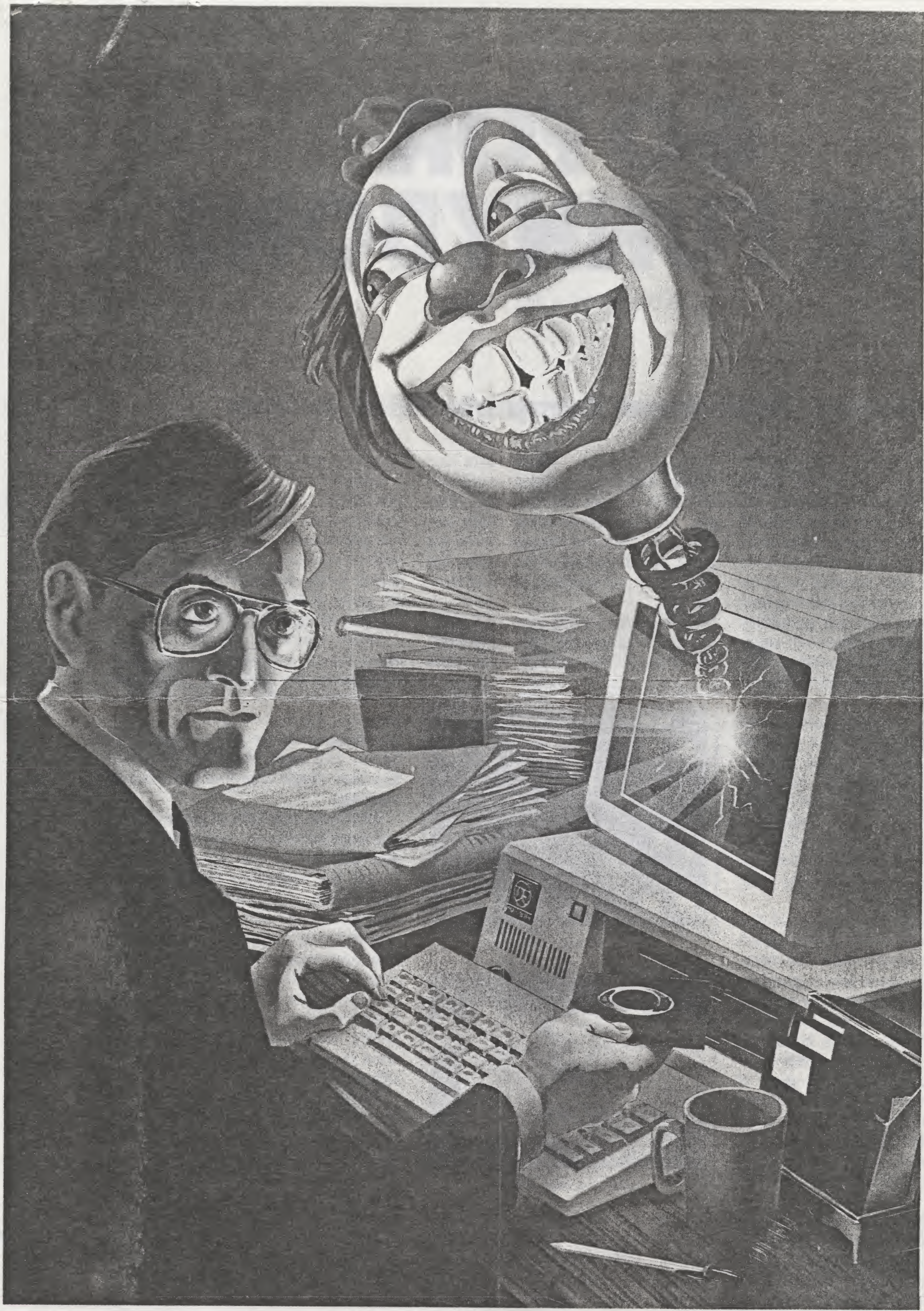
— In the ruins, you'll en-
counter the "Dial Room." You'll
see a lock there. Don't waste
time trying to guess the combi-
nation. It will be revealed in due
time.

— Spend some time in the li-
brary. You can find out a lot
about your mission simply by
studying the reference material.

— Keep Floyd, the robot,
with you. He can bring you
something that no one else can.
Two somethings, in fact.

— How do you get the card
from the bio lab? Maybe some-
one can bring it to you.

—CHARLES ARDAI



GO FOR THE FUNNYBONE

By BRIAN SCOTT & BILL KUNKEL

Games That Come Complete With A Grin

Humor hasn't always been a part of electronic gaming. In the *Space Invaders* era, laughter in gaming was pretty scarce — and in these kinds of paranoid, they're-coming-faster-and-getting-lower contests of endurance and hand-eye skill, nervous laughter serves as a way to release building tension. But games that are genuinely funny are emerging within each separate game genre, and sometimes even as their own sub-genre, as electronic gaming branches off into new areas.

The face of gaming transformed from a nervous laugh to a genuine smile when games started getting "cute" instead of funny. As great strides were made in terms of higher-resolution graphics and enhanced memory, designers turned to the task of wrapping a series of mix-and-match play mechanics in progressively prettier game packages.

Unfortunately, the legacy of the *Pac-Man* era was many games awash in beauty that wasn't even skin deep. Creativity took a back seat to graphics tinkering. You didn't need to actually come up with a new idea, just take a little science fiction, a little horizontal scrolling and a primitive jump-over-or-blow-it-up sequence, give it enchanting graphics, balloon tires and a foot-tapping, original sound track and it was a hit! The game was called *Moon Patrol* and, when it was new, it was just the cutest thing gamers had ever seen.

"Cute" games grow less dominant with every tick of the clock. Sooner or later, players bite through the sugar and begin to wonder "where's the beef?" Home videogames such as

Kaboom, *Freeway*, *Megamania* and *Plaque Attack* were joined on computer and in arcades with *Sneakers*, *Preppie*, *Frogger*, *Jawbreaker* (both versions), *Popeye* and *Pooyan*. Some are good, some are bad — but unlike the Clint Eastwood western, *none* of them are ugly.

Cute games are still produced, often to great sales success. *Quest For Tires*, based on Johnny Hart's popular comic

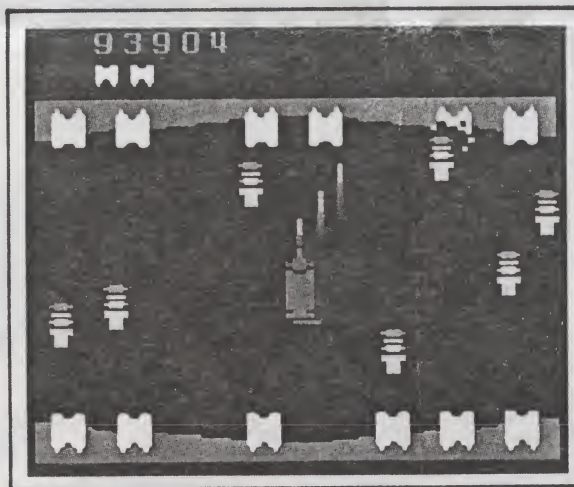
venge, is due this Christmas season.

Electronic games have occasionally attempted comedy, but usually edge more toward slapstick, whacko-with-the-pig-bladder business. It started with an offshoot of the cute genre: the dumb-funny-but-cute type. This type of game is best exemplified by the *Donkey Kong* and *Mario* contests.

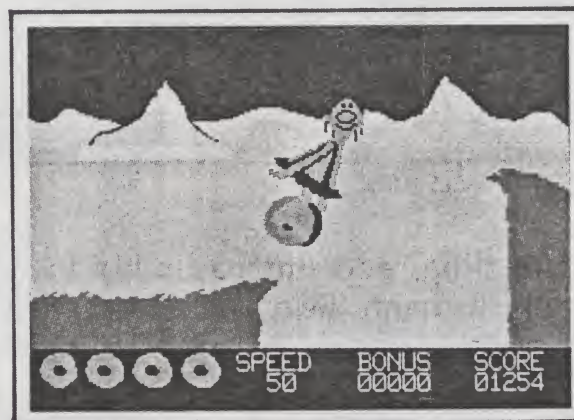
When Nintendo created *Donkey Kong*, humor was merely one of many ingredients the designers employed. Its success or failure was not determined by its hilarity level. Games are designed to be played again and again, and even the Marx Brothers lose their dazzle after four consecutive viewings.

Of course, one form of game humor will ways be with us: sick humor, as it was dubbed in the 50's. Who can forget the legendary *Fireman*, *Fireman* theme, seen in several electronic formats in the midst of the *Space Invaders* frenzy? This game consisted of maneuvering a net horizontally as children leaped from a blazing inferno of an orphanage. If successful, the baby bounced from net to ambulance and safety. One miss, however, and the child sprouted angel's wings and flew offscreen.

Pacific outraged the coin-op world a few years ago with *Shark Attack* (not to be confused with Apollo's 2600 game of the same name), in which divers were snatched in the jaws of the killer fish as the water clouded with disturbingly realistic-looking blood. Even more unsettling was the fact that the player was cast not as the diver but the *shark*, complete with "chomp!" button!



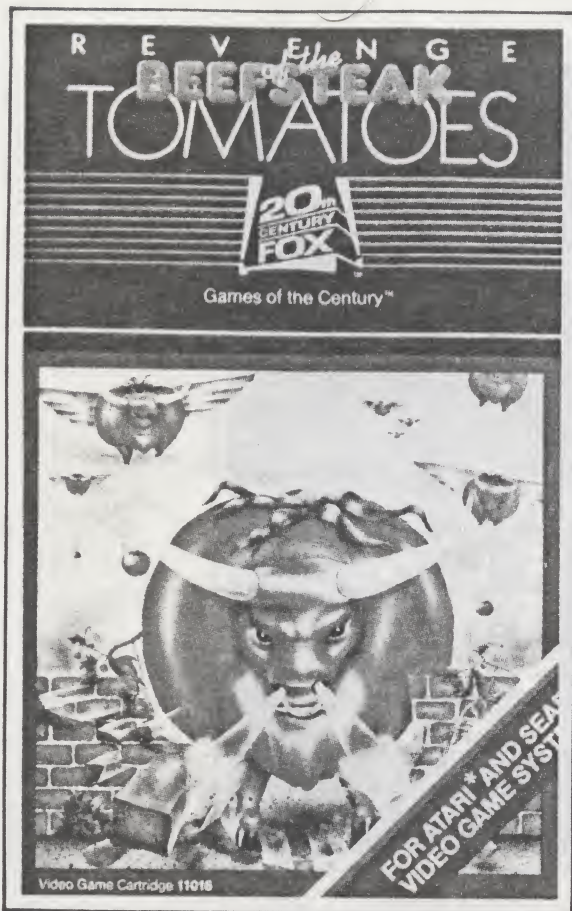
PLAQUE ATTACK (ACTIVISION)



QUEST FOR TIRES (SIERRA)

strip, has proven a winner. The audio is cute and the graphics are near-cartoon quality; while the play-mechanic is challenging enough to keep gamers on their toes. A sequel, *Grog's Re-*

GO FOR THE FUNNYBONE



REVENGE OF THE BEEFSTEAK TOMATOES (FOX)

On computer, sick humor is evident in Thorn/EMI's **Orc Attack**, where heads fall off, orcs are crushed like bugs or burned alive as players defend a fortified wall set in medieval times.

Some of the funniest *sounding* games are often the most mundane. "Drol" is French for "funny", but aside from the cute landscape and whimsical characters, Broderbund's **Drol** is a horizontally-scrolling, multi-level shoot-out, pure and simple.

Sure, **Revenge of the Beefsteak Tomatoes** (a title "borrowed" from "Attack of the Killer Tomatoes", a horror film satire), **Attack of the Mutant Camels** and (especially) **Communist Mutants from Outer Space** *sound* hilarious. In fact, all the humor in these contests can be found on the label.

Accuracy counts, too, in the laugh grabbing sweepstakes. Little touches of realism, such as the interfering fan in Data East's coin-op **Tag-Team**

not based on some piece of relatively trivial realism, but on how downright *human* those little on-screen surrogates can be. In **Boulder Dash** from First Star, players guide a short-tempered little digger through a maze of boulders balanced precariously atop one another. Wait too long to input a movement and little Rockford puts his hands on hips and begins impatiently tapping his foot.

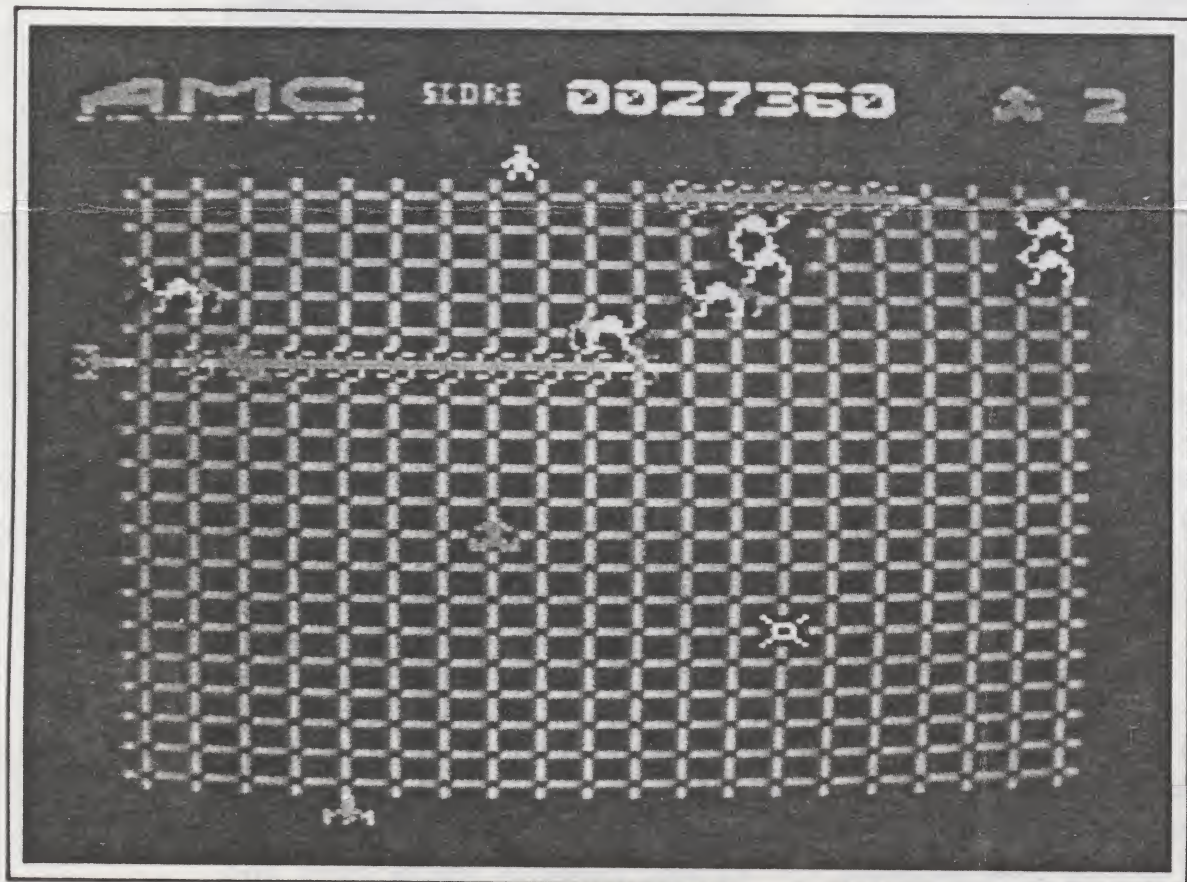
Recently, slapstick games have been making a strong comeback. In the coin-op world, Atari's **Food Fight** and Mylstar's **3 Stooges** are leading the way, while on the home front, the real advances in terms of laughing at our electronic contests are coming from the increasing intelligence and wit being seen in adventure, strategy and role-playing games. As designers become more sophisticated, the games they program can provide much more imaginative responses to user commands.

For example, humorous touches keep a serious, money-minded game like **M.U.L.E.** (Electronic Arts) from being heavyhanded. At the start of a player's turn, the computer might flash messages with either good or bad news, ala Monopoly's Chance cards. "Your M.U.L.E. was judged "best built" at the colony fair," reads one message, awarding the gamer a cash prize. Bad omens, like "You lost \$200 betting on the two-legged kazanga races," deplete the ol' cash reserves.

In Sierra On-Line's **The Dark Crystal**, the normally-serious computer narrator tosses the occasional pun or bad joke at unsuspecting adventurers. When Jen, the hero, tries to chop a vine to use as a rope, the computer responds, "I'm sorry. Jen can cut no vine before its time." Take that, Orson Welles!

Infocom's **Planetfall** was the first adventure game to be billed by its creators as humorous. While the game leaves all the challenge and puzzle-solving aspects of adventuring intact, it also introduces a childlike, hypersensitive robot sidekick named Floyd. This mechanical marvel is so human, he even gets tears in his eyes when his feelings are hurt.

Adventures have even reached the point where they can laugh at themselves. Trapeze Software's **Twisted Tale** pokes fun at the conventions and



ATTACK OF THE MUTANT CAMELS (HES)



M.U.L.E. (ELECTRONIC ARTS)

Wrestling, add immeasurably to a game's charm. Being able to shatter the backboard in Electronic Arts' **One On One** (and, in some versions, see it swept up by a disgruntled maintenance man) is a funny plus, as is the managerial option to "Throw the fight, we can use the money" in Sierra's equally impressive **Championship Boxing**.

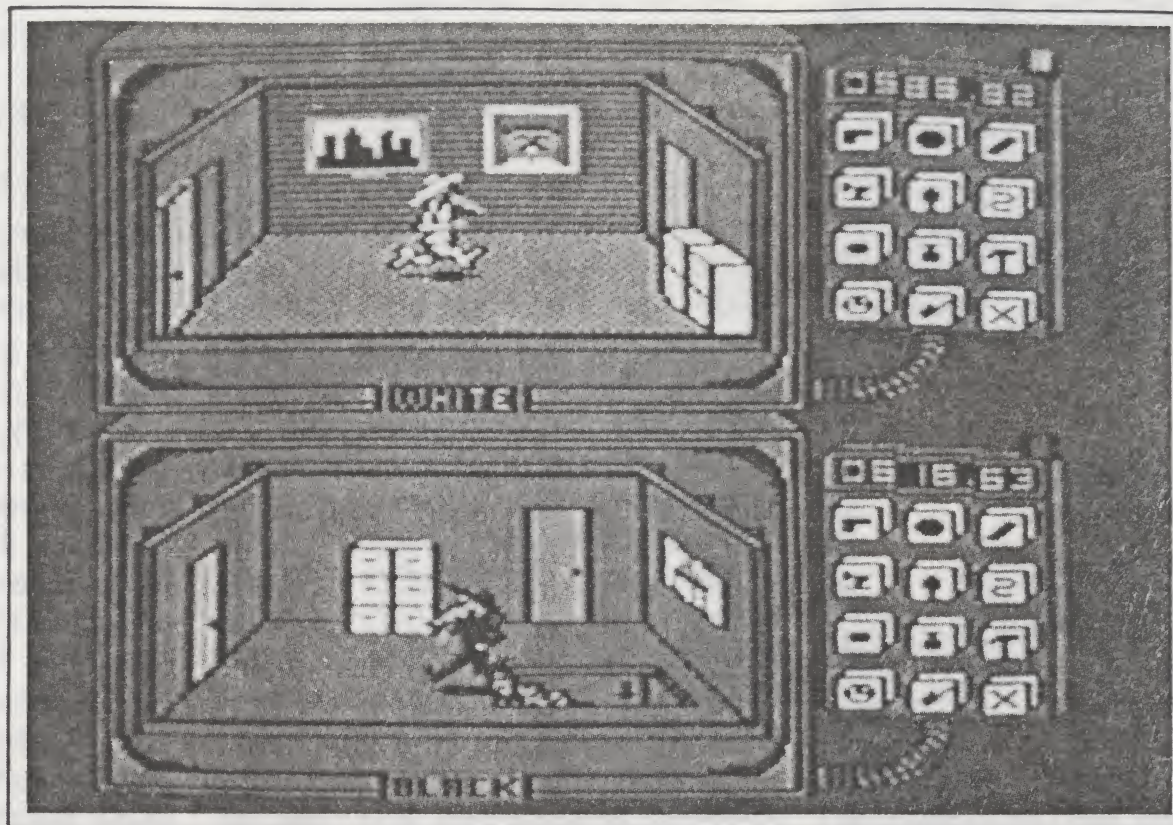
Other times, the little touches are

idiosyncrasies of the classic adventures. Though not a perfect program, *Twisted Tale* is an important game in that it casts a cynical eye at the clichés of the "Run-to-Castle, I-don't-know-what-a-'runtocastle'-is" school of adventures. As its name implies this is a twisted tale indeed, where stories and clues spiral within one another and the comfortable bromides of adventure gaming have all been tossed out the window.

The signs are healthy. *Wit* is replacing the simply cute, and even the seemingly slapstick, madhouse contests have a strategic method to their madness. Broderbund's **Spare Change** casts the player as an arcade manager, attempting to keep his machines stocked with coins while contending with a pair of whacko "Zerks" — arcade game characters who've come to life and are attempting to steal enough tokens to break out! As the manager, players must collect tokens in a large vat (as well as keeping the cash register stocked from the safe's supply of coins) in order to move up in play levels. At the end of each round, the Zerks perform a little skit, and the next level is revealed. Since there are two Zerks and only one manager, the game provides several means of distraction, growing in charm and number as play moves along. Put a token in the juke box, for example, and those Zerks are instantly afflicted with a case of Happy Feet. Or drop a token in the phone and the two gossipy little goofs run to the receivers to chat. There's also a popcorn machine that keeps them enraptured and, for the arcade operator himself, a slot machine on the final level. Complete this rack to win a "Zerk Show", an arcade machine that allows any of the Zerk skits to be performed on command.

Going even further are the various versions of **Gremlins** from Atari (except for the 2600 version, which is both awful and a totally different game), where the hero has to keep those Mogwais dry, eliminate the Gremlins, and watch the refrigerator after midnight. Mogwais and Gremlins alike love to watch television, and even turn it on themselves, then sit transfixed by the tube.

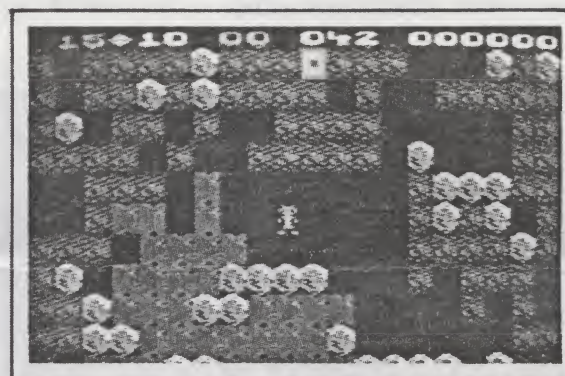
This Christmas season brings us **Spy vs Spy** from First Star, based on the classic Prohias strip from Mad Maga-



SPY VS. SPY (FIRST STAR)



DARK CRYSTAL (SIERRA)



BOULDER DASH (FIRST STAR)

zine. A dual perspective screen following each spy's movements gives this number slapstick, wit and the cutes, all at the same time. True to the comic strip, the object is to set traps to catch the opposing spy — without being trapped first.

The sophistication, of course, is only beginning. These are the first fumbling steps toward the integration of genuine laughter into our game playing. Even speech synthesis has been made available directly onto software without the involvement of separate units. Just as **Space Fury** gathered chuckles with its haughty announcement, as play began, "Ah, a creature for my amusement!" and Pacific got yuks in **Thief** with its continuous police radio sound effects, new products will take this much further. Regional accents, dialects, an incredible variety of speech from boarding school British to dese-dem-and-dose will keep players giggling for years to come.

For a very long time, electronic gaming had it too easy. Like the ador-

able child whose pranks were forgiven because he was "so cute", electronic gaming has entered its awkward age. Today's designer knows a prettier spaceship is still a spaceship.

Chances are that the games we play — and laugh at — will continue to contain a little Oscar Wilde and a little Three Stooges. What matters is how well it's done. After all, even old Oscar must have enjoyed a pie in the kisser occasionally.

To your joysticks, fellow users, and start laughing!



PLANETFALL (INFOCOM)

New novels on computer cast the player in an active role

Continued from Page E-1

can get increasingly revealing hints on how to solve the problem.

A cheaper solution is to buy a \$9.95 copy of "A Short-cut Through Adventureland," which covers 10 of the Infocom games. But have a friend pore through the book for you, as the secrets of each game are plainly written and you might read more than you want to.

The games themselves come on floppy disks, so you'll need a disk drive and at least 32K of memory to make them work. The games come formatted for nearly all home computers; look for them in stores that carry your brand of computer.

The downtown Book Cache also carries a small selection, as does Fred Meyer.

That's a trend of which you'll see more in the near future. Several Infocom games have been reviewed in the New York Times Review of Books, and their newest series will soon be marketed in bookstores.

If you decide to give these interactive novels a try, pick one in a field you already enjoy. They come in four distinct genres: science fiction, mystery, fantasy and tales of adventure. They also come in three grades of difficulty: standard, advanced and expert.

Here's a quick review of the Infocom selection:

✓ **Zork I, II and III.** The now-classic fantasy trilogy, in which the player must gather treasures, confound irritating wizards and unravel the mysteries of the great underground empire. If you enjoyed "Lord of the Rings," you'll love Zork. Zork I is rated standard by Infocom, Zork II and III are rated advanced.

✓ **Enchanter & Sorcerer.** Parts I and II of a new trilogy. In Enchanter, you begin as a novice enchanter, charged with exploring a nearby castle and banishing the evil Krill. In Sorcerer, you awaken to discover that your patron Belboz has disappeared and you must locate and rescue him. It has a bigger landscape and a more intriguing series of puzzles than Enchanter. Enchanter is rated standard, Sorcerer is advanced. A third adventure in the series is yet to come.

✓ **Deadline.** The first of the Infocom murder mysteries, is also the most difficult. It's rated by Infocom at the "expert" level. A prominent businessman has died from an overdose of Ebullion. The police report calls it suicide, but the local police chief has his doubts and so has called you in to examine clues and interrogate a houseful of possible suspects. It's a difficult but fascinating introduction to the possibilities of interactive fiction.

✓ **Witness.** Another murder mystery, set in the 1930s and written in the style of

those old detective novels. Another gaggle of suspects, and this time you were an actual witness to the crime. You must find the killer before the slayer strikes again. This game is rated standard by Infocom, considerably easier than Deadline.

✓ **Suspect.** This is the newest of the Infocom mysteries. It's been on the shelves in Boston only the past couple of weeks and has yet to arrive in Anchorage. In this adventure, rated advanced, you're a newspaper reporter, sent to cover a society ball in Baltimore. This time you have a very special reason to try to find the murderer: You're the suspect.

✓ **Infidel.** This is the first of a genre Infocom calls "tales of adventure." You're a down-on-your-luck adventurer, lured to Egypt by an old map and the promise of hidden treasures in the secret crypt of a buried pyramid. It's a competent game that requires deciphering some homemade hieroglyphics, but the ending may leave you with a dry taste in your mouth. Rated advanced by Infocom.

✓ **Seastalker.** The first of the Infocom games to be aimed at a younger audience, it was written by an author of the modern Tom Swift and Hardy Boys adventure stories. It's an undersea adventure that differs from the other games by offering clues if you're having trouble un-

tangling the mysteries. Aimed at anyone 9 years of age and older.

✓ **Cutthroats.** This one is hot off the presses and not yet available in Anchorage. Recent reviews have said it has the most well-developed characters yet. A gang of cutthroats arrives at the remote island where you live, searching for sunken treasure and enlisting your expertise as diver and guide for a cut of the action... if you can survive. Rated standard.

✓ **Starcross.** Packaged in a Frisbee-like container, takes you into the other-world of science fiction. This adventure sets you up as an interstellar miner in search of profitable black holes. But what you encounter this trip is an alien "artifact" that you must explore and re-activate. Beware: Infocom gives this game an expert rating. It is painfully difficult.

✓ **Planetfall.** If you have any tolerance at all for science fiction, you will find superb entertainment in this extraterrestrial adventure. It opens with you swabbing the decks of an interstellar cruiser, but soon you're blasted away onto a planet whose deserted high-tech islands you must explore. Where have you landed, and what has happened to all the people? A superbly entertaining game/novel. Rated standard, and highly recommended.

✓ **Suspended.** Another sci-fi adventure. This time you're

✓ **The Hitchhiker's Guide**

to the Galaxy. Welcome to what may be the next classic of interactive fiction. Author Douglas Adams, who wrote the best-selling book, takes his hand at programming in the newest Infocom game, which is rated standard. You are Arthur Dent, and all you can do is laugh as the world you have known disappears and you are launched onto adventures at the outer limits of space. Don't panic!

Itching for a sneak preview of the future?
PRESS THE RED BUTTON...

Arguments prove this expedition is a winner

I THINK I would enjoy **Expedition Amazon** if I ever got a chance to play it – most of the time I was looking over the shoulders of my teenage offspring watching their progress.

This is because only two expeditions can be in progress at any time, that is, saved on the disc to be resumed later.

It means that if I were to sneak a quick game while they are at school, and try to start a new expedition of my own, one of the existing parties would be wiped out.

This is a serious drawback in a good game – what a pity there is no facility to initialise another disc for storing lots of expeditions. Potentially dangerous situations could then be backed up and replayed several times.

The aim is to discover the fabled lost city of Ka, which lies buried beneath the jungle in Peru.

The scene is set by the prologue in the leaflet accompanying the game which describes how Professor Arrowhead – a part-time academic of somewhat dubious reputation – became convinced that Inca is really spelled In Ka – hence the lost city.

He also spells Indian as Injun

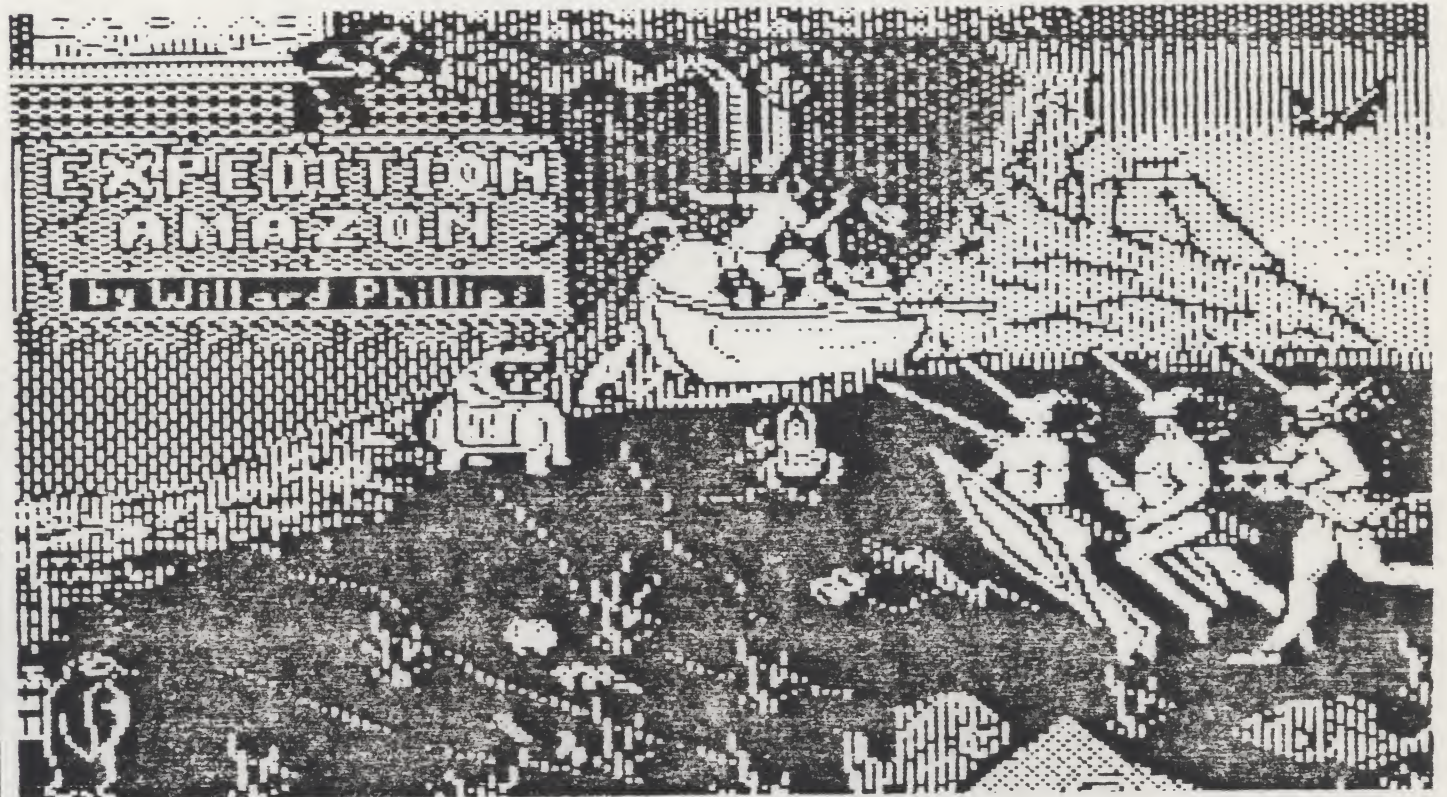
– does this mean a possible follow-up set in North America?

There is lots of humour in the game. The fun starts with the pictures on the back of the disc envelope. As well as the usual

warnings, Penguin advise us for example, not to put the disc in the pop-up toaster, not to use it as part of a slingshot or to line the floor of the bath or the cage. But seriously after recruit-

ing the expedition members – field assistant, medic, radio operator and guard – one goes predictably to the trading post to equip them.

After an appropriate mess-



Spot the sub-aqua Penguin in the title page

In the footsteps of Zork – from previous page

is outstanding. There's a "National Detective Gazette" which among the '30s memorabilia includes hints on how to play the game. A newspaper outlines the stories of the day, including the murder that introduced the case. Even a telegram and suicide note are included, and the matchbook found outside the house completes the package in style.

Deadline launches you into the Robner estate, where Mr Robner has died of an overdose. Suicide probably. But why was he about to change his will?

Sergeant Duffy will fingerprint anything for you, or take objects to the lab for analysis. With his help, you must uncover any foul play. Having gathered enough clues, you may arrest your suspect and await the

outcome of the trial – so they tell me.

The potpourri of supplementary evidence in the package includes notes from interviews with all the main characters, a coroner's examination, a photograph from the scene of the death, a lab report, and even three tablets from the suicide bottle! Official letters outline your task, complementing an informative Inspector's casebook.

Be careful, Watson, these cases are not elementary!

Enchanter and **Sorcerer** kick off a series of unique quests by Infocom. The two games, Zork IV and V, have a similar, if not identical, style with the Zork trilogy.

Their trademark is the gold book. The game is a treasure

you discover more and more spells to add to your collection. They may be cast on a most anything, a terrific accomplishment by the programmers.

Some spells found on scrolls are too powerful to learn, and may only be cast once. Often, such a spell could solve many problems, but to which one is it the unique solution? Using it unnecessarily will thwart the quest.

Enchanter, your adventures start when the Circle of Enchanters summons you. Dark times have arrived, you are told. Your power is strengthening and its influence is stretching.

An ancient document speaks of such times and declares that a great and powerful enchanter will appear to assist you in this time of darkness and calamity.

a more powerful enchanter would too soon reveal the power of the circle. You must explore Krill's castle and bring back his dark secrets.

This is the introduction to a superb game, my favourite of the five. Delve deep into the castle, discover magic, uncover sinister secrets, dream strange dreams.

Dreams? That's right, you actually *live* Infocom games. Forget to sleep and you are too tired to remember spells. Eat, or starve to death. Drink, or die. No two ways about it.

The characters in **Enchanter** are all beautifully developed. Owners of the Zork trilogy will especially enjoy the familiar adventurer who is found along the way.

Just as well developed is the

age on the screen during the disc access – un momento por favor – one meets a wonderful character called Pedro who wiggles his moustache, winks at you and tells the 'Gringo' appalling jokes until you can bear it no longer and press a key to get on with the game.

Once in the jungle the expedition begins to map the various sectors. The treasure they find can vary from the valuable – such as a raw diamond – to the worthless – a mere clay pot – or even the ridiculous – a pet rock, a Dr Spock book, or, would you believe, a Speak-and-Spell.

The hazards are equally bizarre – rabies, yellow fever, fleas which cause plague, and even crocodiles which can give a character 'big toe injuries'. In this game D & D stands for disease and disability.

Treasures can be taken back to the trading post and sold to our old amigo, Pedro. He's something of a crook though, and bargaining can push up the prices.

When the team members have acquired enough equipment and built up their strength, they can begin to explore the underground tunnels trying to



Pedro greets you bilingually in Expedition Amazon

avoid being drowned in flooded crypts or wiped out by volcanic eruptions.

It is here with animated action they eventually find the maze and the door to the lost city. It takes a very long time.

If characters are killed, new ones can be recruited by finding the way back to base camp and though their expertise will be low, the expedition retains its equipment and money.

There is a choice of nine

difficulty levels. Even level one, which is supposed to be very easy, is really quite hard so this should give many hours of entertainment.

A minor quibble is that the instructions consist of nine pages of print on the boot side of the disc so once the game is in progress and the disc turned over, they cannot be referred to.

On first playing the game it is a good idea to make notes of key instructions. Why not

provide these pages on paper and include them in the package?

Niggles apart, if a game is judged by the number of arguments over whose turn it is to play then this looks a winner.

Gill Reeve

*Title: Expedition Amazon
Author: Willard Phillips
Publisher: Penguin Software
Requirements: 48k*

mysterious atmosphere. Playing the game is like reading a fairy story. Just don't expect a happy ending all of the time. Krill isn't smiling because he likes you!

Equally magical is the packaging. Enclosed is the sealed document that defines your task. It's on parchment paper, and I'm still not sure if the ink is dry. Prepared by the "Printer's Guild" is an instruction manual, a fine work of calligraphy.

In **Sorcerer** you are the renowned enchanter who defeated Krill. But a new task is at hand. Belboz, the leader of the Circle of Enchanters, has disappeared. His abandoned cryptic diary hints that he has fallen victim to evil sorcery. You must find Belboz and rescue him from... from what?

An engrossing magical

kingdom opens itself for exploration. The kingdom is large and diverse. Problems from magical minefields to a menacing hawk in an amusement park face you. A worthy sequel to **Enchanter**.

The packaging is once again out of this world. Especially peculiar is the "infotater", a windowed envelope containing a rotating disc which reveals information about monsters when turned. The solution to a problem perhaps?

Both adventures have fascinating puzzles. There is no messing around with nonsensical solutions. Each problem is charming yet has a logical end.

I think these games come closer to the non-computer role-playing games such as **Dungeons and Dragons** than do

adventures like **Wizardry**. Highly recommended for fantasy fanatics.

Each Infocom game is very convenient to play. Saving the play to disc is possible at any point, and there are single letter abbreviations for several common commands.

If you have been in a room more than once descriptions are shortened. In fact, a whole list of features cater for every fuss. The play may even be recorded on a printer.

Excellent hint books and maps are available from Infocom if you get desperate. Even if you have to resort to such devices, you should still be able to enjoy the games because care has been taken not to give too much away.

There is no doubt that

Infocom games are immensely popular. Why? Because of the full-sentence input? The latest games have 1,000 plus word vocabularies. Because of the superb realism? Playing a game is like acting out a book. Perhaps because of the fine attention to detail? The packages are ever more spectacular.

Whatever it is, people will rave about these games until the cows come home.

Julian Brewer

*Titles: Planetfall, Enchanter, Sorcerer, Deadline, Witness.
Authors: Not credited.
Publisher: Infocom.
Requirements: 32k minimum for any Apple II or for the Mac.*

Chess Champ

A chess program, *Chess Champ* matches your chess ability against its own. Six "look ahead" levels let you control how many moves the program can plan ahead. You use the cursor keys to move the chess pieces instead of typing in coordinates. List price: \$34.95. Requirements: 64K, one disk drive, graphics board.

Rensin Communications
P.O. Box 414
College Park, MD 20740
202/728-7955

Gato

A World War II submarine on patrol is simulated in *Gato*. The game features three-dimensional perspective with realistic ship movements. Enemy vessels may flee or attack when the sub is detected. There are nine levels of difficulty, day and night missions, and actual Morse code messages. List price: \$39.95. Requirements: 128K, one disk drive, graphics board.

Spectrum Holobyte, Inc.
2006 Broadway #301
Boulder, CO 80302
800/621-8385

Bluebush Chess

A chess program, *Bluebush Chess* has eight skill levels, which you can switch among during a game. You can also switch sides. The chess pieces can be arranged in any way. Lists of possible moves and previous moves are provided, and all are automatically checked for legality. You can take back any move and ask the computer to suggest your best move. List price: \$49.95. Requirements: 64K, one disk drive.

Bluebush
P.O. Box 3585
Santa Clara, CA 95055
408/244-1631

Planetfall

The prose adventure game *Planetfall* is a humorous interactive science fiction adventure. You are the lowliest ensign aboard the Stellar Patrol Ship *Feinstein*. When the ship explodes, you are jet-tisoned into a mysterious and deserted world plagued by floods, pestilence, and mutant fauna. You meet Floyd, a mischievous multipurpose robot with whom you must find a way to escape the planet. List price: \$39.95. Requirements: 64K, one disk drive.

Infocom, Inc.
55 Wheeler St.
Cambridge, MA 02138
617/492-1031

"*Funny, challenging, and a masterpiece of 'interactive fiction.'* I can't wait for the sequel." David A. Basskin, Toronto, Ontario, Canada

Nomination

Players campaign against major presidential candidates of either party in *Nomination*. Up to five people conduct a primary campaign by issuing statements, answering the press, making endorsements, and deciding whether or not to use dirty tricks. At the outset each player takes a stand on ten issues, from the ERA to defense spending; the positions taken affect fund-raising ability. Players use their resources to collect the most convention delegates. Players can run against Democrats, Republicans, or each other. List price: \$29.95. Requirements: 128K, one disk drive.

Brady Co.
Bowie, MD 20715
301/262-6300

Grandma's House

Children choose characters to visit *Grandma's House*. Then they explore special places to get things for Grandma. Children can decorate Grandma's house in any way they like. List price: \$34.95. Requirements: 64K, one disk drive, color graphics board.

Spinnaker Software Corp.
1 Kendall Square
Cambridge, MA 02139
617/494-1200

Gramarcy

Players try to find all words that can be made from the letters of a given word in *Gramarcy*. You can take as much time as you need, but you get bonus points for finishing before the clock runs out. *Gramarcy* calculates and reports the number of words it has found. The program selects words from its own data base, to which you can add. You can check a new entry to find out how many words can be made from its letters. List price: with DOS 1.10 \$33.95, with DOS 2.00 or a later version \$29.95. Requirements: 128K, one disk drive, color graphics board.

Robert L. Nicolai
4038 N. Ninth St.
St. Louis, MO 63147
314/621-0730

Hangman

Players pick letters of the alphabet as they try to guess a word the computer has chosen in *Hangman*. The game comes in two versions: *Hangman for the Superintelligent* and *Foreign Language Hangman*. *Hangman for the Superintelligent* uses esoteric words, which are briefly defined, or famous sayings and quotations with the author's name provided as a clue. The game includes over 1000 words and has four levels of difficulty. One person can play against the computer, or players can compete with each other. *Foreign Language Hangman* comes with a list of 700 basic vocabulary words in either French or Spanish and a utility program for creating your own word list. Words and phrases can be presented in English or translation with the clues given in the opposite language. List price: \$20. PC requirements: 64K with DOS 1.10, 96K with DOS 2.00 or a later version, one disk drive. PCjr requirements: 128K, one disk drive.

Norland Software
1014A W. Badger Rd.
Madison, WI 53713
608/255-0294

Multi-Color Plotters

The Strobe 200 drum-type plotter features an easy-to-use control panel, an efficient paper-loading system, and a holder that accepts a wide variety of pens for graphics and lettering. It plots areas of up to 8 by 10 inches, with a step size of .002 inches along the X or Y axis.

The plotter costs \$845, including a TRS-80 parallel interface card. An RS-232C serial interface for CP/M microcomputers provides four foreign-language character sets and costs \$195.

★★★★★

Strobe's Model 260 graphics plotter is an automatic six-pen version of the Model 200. It lets you plot graphs and charts using up to six different colors with automatic pen changes. Software options let you preselect colors before using the plot and to generate high-resolution bar charts, pie charts, and line graphs (at 500 steps per inch along both the X and Y axes). Alphanumeric characters are also included for

labeling charts and creating pages of text.

The Strobe Model 260 costs \$995 and includes an RS-232 interface. The pens are held in a cartridge, and each color pen is individually replaceable. For more information on these two plotters, contact Strobe Inc., 897 Independence Ave., Building 5A, Mountain View, CA 94043, 415-969-5130.

Reader Service ✓551

Watch Out for Falling Planets!

You are space-wrecked on a civilized alien planet that is apparently deserted. You and your robot companion, Floyd, have up to 10 days to solve riddles, stop the planet from plummeting into the sun, and save the planet's plague-stricken population. Nothing too difficult for the seasoned gamer... or is it?

Planetfall, written by Steven Meretzky, is the third in a series of science fiction games from Infocom Inc. The game heightens realism by increasing the interaction between

the player and Floyd, and by allowing players to find food, eat, sleep, get sick, and even dream. Depending on your actions, different moves take different amounts of time, a serious consideration since you are competing against time to win. All game commands are in English, with a vocabulary of over 600 words to draw from.

Planetfall's packaging is different from most other games. Inside a folder-like package you find a Stellar Patrol ID Card, a space diary, futuristic postcards, and other elements that complement the story. Planetfall costs \$49.95, is available for both the Models I and III, and can be purchased from either Infocom Inc. (55 Wheeler St., Cambridge, MA 02138, 617-492-1031) or any major computer store.

Reader Service ✓555

Wild Irish... Disks?

A new flexible disk, produced using a special binding method, that cleans disks as they spin is being made by Irish Magnetic Industries Inc. (270-78 Newton Road, Plainview, NY 11803, 516-293-5582). The 5¼- and 8-inch disks are produced from high-quality, mylar-based, magnetically coated materials with unique surface lubricants that minimize head and disk friction and ensure data integrity.

All disks are individually

jacketed and are packaged 10 to a box. The 5¼-inch, 48-tracks-per-inch disks have a suggested list price of from \$32.90 to \$49.80 for single- to double-sided format, and single to double densities. The 8-inch disk costs range between \$49.80 and \$69.80 for single and double densities.

Reader Service ✓558

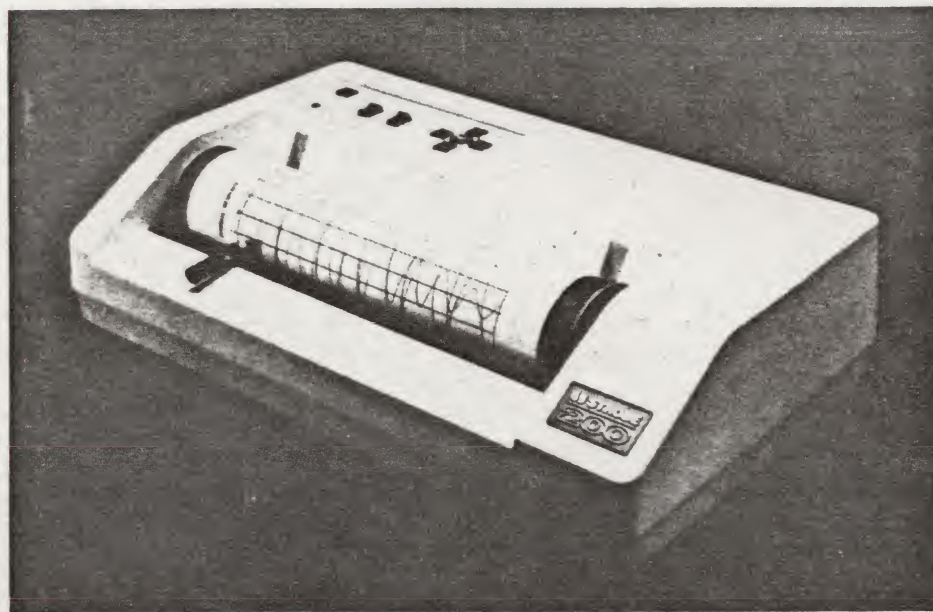
Model 4 Upgrade

Now you can convert your 16K cassette Model 4 computer to a 64K or 128K disk-drive system with Micro-Design's new upgrade kit. This kit includes the new MDX-6 disk controller board, drive mounting towers, two disk drives, a power supply, sound board, an RS-232 serial board, and memory. An illustrated user's manual provides instructions on kit installation.

The MDX-6 disk controller board is redesigned to run with the Model 4 at its 4 MHz speed. It controls up to four installed or add-on disk drives. The drives may be either 5¼- or 8-inch capacity, single- or double-sided, or any combination. The MDX-6 also has gold-plated edge connectors to ensure trouble-free operation.

This upgrade kit costs \$399 and is available from Micro-Design, 6301 Manchaca Road, Suite B, Austin, TX 78745, 800-531-5002.

Reader Service ✓573



The Strobe 200 multi-color plotter.

New Products listings are based on information supplied in manufacturers' press releases. 80 Micro has not tested or reviewed these products and cannot guarantee any claims.



New Games from Infocom

APC users who enjoy stimulating their minds through interactive prose adventures will have an opportunity to explore the lighthearted side of science fiction this summer when Infocom, Inc., introduces Planetfall, a game that challenges players with saving a doomed and plague-stricken planet while trying to keep a straight face. The new game is expected to be on retailer shelves in mid-August.

Steven Meretzky, author of Planetfall and a long-time contributor to the Infocom game development process, says, "There are several interesting elements that make this game unique. One of the most important is the high level of interaction between the player and a strong second character known as 'Floyd.'"

"Floyd, an impish robot who is your constant companion in the game, has a well-defined personality. He's exuberant, funny, mischievous, and sometimes unpredictable. The decision to concentrate on this strong second character has allowed us to build rich detail into the personality.

"Also in Planetfall, depending on your actions, different moves take different amounts of time, a factor that heightens the realism. Players will find food, eat, sleep, get sick, and even dream. After being space-wrecked on an alien planet that is civilized but apparently deserted, players will have up to ten days (game time) to solve the puzzles, stop the planet from plummeting into the sun, and save the population.

"In addition, the packaging of Planetfall is new and different. Inside a folder-like package players find such physical elements as a Stellar Patrol ID Card, a space diary, futuristic postcards, and other elements that complement the story," added Meretzky.

Although Meretzky is making his debut as an author with Planetfall, for more than one and one-half years he has been one of the behind-the-scenes professionals responsible for the level of sophistication in these software products. The author, who like several other Infocom staffers was educated at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, has play-tested many of the other games

now being marketed by Infocom. Meretzky, an avid science fiction fan, joined the staff on a full-time basis last fall and soon after began work on Planetfall.

New Magical World

In the fall, Infocom will expand its recreational software line with the release of Enchanter, the first in a new trilogy of fantasy games that will take players into a world of magical powers and perilous predicaments.

Co-authored by Marc Blank and Dave Lebling, the team that designed and wrote Infocom's Zork underground fantasy series, Enchanter is a journey into an environment where you need skill and logic to overcome "Krill," an evil warlock whose ever-increasing powers have shattered the peace of your world.

Blank, who in addition to designing, writing and programming games, is vice president for product development at Infocom, said, "This game is written in the Zork tradition, but with new and different settings. In the Zork trilogy, the emphasis is on treasure and fighting, while the focus is on magic in Enchanter."

Blank said that players explore an abandoned castle filled with strange and magical trappings. Players uncover spell scrolls which you must learn to use judiciously in overcoming obstacles. The object of the game is to use magic so effectively that the evil warlock will be banished forever.

"Another important element in Enchanter is the passing of game time," Blank added. "As the days go by in the story, you eat, drink and sleep, and eventually reach a point where your powers begin to fail."

Enchanter is slated to retail for \$49.95 (some versions will be \$59.95), and it's expected to be on retailer shelves in mid-September.

The new games join a long list of other interactive adventures. They include two other science fiction games, Starcross and Suspended; the Zork trilogy of games, an underground adventure series; and Deadline and Witness, two games in the whodunit genre.

All Infocom products use a proprietary programming system that enables players to communicate with the game in normal English. Known as the Interlogic series, these prose adventures offer the most complete vocabulary available today (over 600 words).

Infocom's products are marketed through software distributors, major retail chains, personal computer manufacturers and exporters. Consumers can purchase the games in such locations as personal computer stores, major department stores, book stores and hobby stores. Infocom was founded in 1979 by entrepreneurs educated at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. □

DESIGNER SOFTWARE

Looking for a Buffer

NECIS should provide disk buffering and print buffering in the operating system. This would allow disk intensive routines to run 2 to 3 times quicker.

The print buffer would allow output to be stored in internal memory to keep the printer going while the computer could move on to another task.

Also, concurrent CP/M-86 would allow true multitasking and would be very valuable to a variety of applications.

—DP III, Cincinatti, OH

Reader Note 1: Change of Address

Please note that, as of August 1, 1983, NexWorld's editorial and subscription offices will now be located at: 388 Old Turnpike Road, Woodstock, CT 06281. Telephone (203) 974-3505. Please be sure to use this new address in any future correspondence. Thank you.

NEW SOFTWARE

The Sales Manager helps executives in sales, marketing, and general business manage information. Individual program modules keep track of customers, prospects, sales representatives, quotas, commissions, planning, forecasting, expenses, sales, and personnel. For the **IBM Personal Computer**; requires 128K bytes of memory; \$450. Market Power, 11780 Rough & Ready Rd., Rough & Ready, CA 95975.

Games

Cribbage Master II is for novice and experienced players alike. All standard cribbage rules are observed. The program occasionally makes human-like mistakes but always keeps an accurate hand count and crib score. For **TRS-80 Models I**

and **III** disk systems; \$21.95. Manhattan Software, POB 1063, Woodland Hills, CA 91365.

Galactic Gladiators is a strategy game that pits a player's team against 16 different space creatures. Each gladiator and evil doer is given a different strength, dexterity, endurance, experience, and weapons-skills rating. Your job is to beat the living daylights out of the bad guys. For the **IBM Personal Computer** with color capabilities; \$39.95. Strategic Simulations, Bldg. A-200, 883 Stierlin Rd., Mountain View, CA 94043.

Juice's central character, Edison, must build his circuit board before Killerwatt or Flash disconnects everything in sight. This strategy game features six skill levels each with three rounds plus

a bonus round. For the **Atari 400, 800, and 1200XL** with 32K bytes of memory, \$29.95; for the **Commodore 64**, \$34.95. Tronix Publishing Inc., 8295 South La Cienega Blvd., Inglewood, CA 90301.

Jury Trial, a courtroom strategy game, puts you in the shoes of a government prosecutor. It's up to you to pick a jury, question witnesses, avoid the devious defense attorney's objections, and persuade the jurors to convict the suspect. For the **Apple II**; \$29. Navic Software, POB 14727, North Palm Beach, FL 33408.

M*A*S*H is an arcade-type game based on the popular television show. You airlift wounded soldiers to the 4077th, moving quickly to save as many lives as possible. For the **TI 99/4A**; cartridge; joysticks recommended; \$39.95. Texas Instruments, POB 53, Lubbock, TX 79408.

Matchboxes, a one- or two-player computer skill game, challenges your powers of intuition and recall. From a grid of 36 numbered boxes, you try to match pairs of identical creatures or objects. Every time you make a match you get a glimpse of two pieces of the hidden word puzzle you are trying to solve. For the **Atari 400 and 800**; \$29.95. Broderbund Software, 1938 Fourth St., San Rafael, CA 94901.

Planetfall is an adventure game that challenges you to save a doomed planet. Equipped with a robot companion, you have 10 days (in game time) to solve various puzzles, stop your planet from plummeting into the sun, and save the population. For most popular 8-bit microcomputers including 8-bit CP/M systems; \$49.95 and \$59.95 depending on version. Infocom Inc., 55 Wheeler St., Cambridge, MA 02138.

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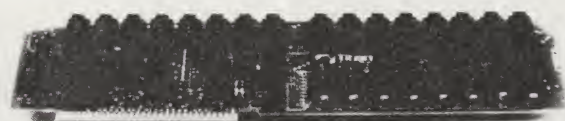
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CIRCLE NUMBER 91

On the Scene (Cont.)

MINERAL CAVE is an educational adventure game that provides practice for upper elementary through high school students in identifying various minerals using scientific testing procedures. Upon entering the cave, the student becomes an adventurer from another time, complete with armor, a sword, and 200 pieces of gold for barter. The adventurer identifies minerals using a key, given properties of the minerals and the results of simulated tests. The package includes a program disk, teacher's guide, and user information card. The retail price is \$34.95 plus \$1.50 shipping. Order from **TECK Assoc., P.O. Box 8732, White Bear Lake, MN 55110, (612) 429-5570.**

CIRCLE NUMBER 92

PLANETFALL is a lighthearted science fiction game in which your humdrum life as an ensign in the "Stellar Patrol" changes when you become spacewrecked on a civilized but apparently deserted

alien planet. You and your new companion Floyd, a charming and mischievous robot, have up to 10 days (game time) to solve the puzzles, avoid plagues and floods, and stop the planet from plummeting into the sun. The game includes a manual, Stellar Patrol ID badge, space diary, and postcards. It retails for \$49.95 (some versions \$59.95). For more information, contact: **Infocom, Inc., 55 Wheeler St., Cambridge, MA 02138, (617) 492-1031.**

CIRCLE NUMBER 94

RANDAMN is an action game that takes place everywhere from the graveyard to Stonehenge and outer space—even to Satan's playground. At each stage, its Mystic Slot Machine spins to reveal the unusual opponents it has selected for you. The random decisions to which you must quickly adapt your playing strategy continue through seven different, Hi-Res worlds of seven stages each. If you manage to survive all the worlds, you earn a reward and become the new demigod "Randamn," lord of random events. **RANDAMN** is available for \$34.95 from **Magnum Software, 21115 Devonshire St., Suite 337, Chatsworth, CA 91311, (213) 700-0510.**



CIRCLE NUMBER 95

GRAND SLAM TRIVIA is a baseball question-and-answer game offering three levels of questions and multiple-choice or direct keyboard entry answers. Adding to the feel of major league competition is the option to select offensive and defensive strategies like hit 'n run, steal a base, sacrifice, pick off a runner, go for a double play, etc. Over 650 questions are included. Smooth graphic animation punctuates each event and heightens suspense. This game is available for \$34.95 from: **DataKnight, Normandy Circle, Glenmoore, PA 19343, (215) 431-8900.**

CIRCLE NUMBER 96



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CIRCLE NUMBER 93

PLANETFALL

The end justifies the means in *Planetfall*—even murder, after a fashion—and those who take their scruples into the game with them should abandon all hope of winning.

As usual, Infocom has given adventurers an all-text game containing an intricate, absorbing, and humorous series of puzzles. You are low ensign on a starship, which is about to blow up (cause unknown). Fortunately, the gods look out for shlemiels, and you alone escape in an emergency vehicle to fulfill your destiny, which is on an ostensibly uninhabited planet. With your emergency survival kit, you must explore abandoned settlements, locate crucial rooms and tools, and save the planet from the many disasters that threaten

to destroy it. And you must work quickly, since there's a virus in the air that could kill you if you take too long.

The game is full of such futuristic stuff as teleportation booths, computerized life support systems, and lasers. You even latch on to a robot companion who is loyal and true and tells the same stories over and over—just like real people do. Use him mercilessly.

There is logic and order to the story line. Every time you come up against what seems to be an insoluble problem, a little creative thinking will get you out. This makes *Planetfall* a totally satisfying game. You can, by the way, finish it without completing all the steps leading up to the ending, but in that case the ending will be different. —Randi Hacker

Infocom, AP, AT, C64, IBM, MAC (D), \$45.

DON'T MISS

Role-playing

Wizardry (Sir-Tech) AP, IBM

Ultima I, II, III (Sierra-on-Line; Origin Systems) AP, AT, C64, IBM (not all games available for each system)

Graphic

Scott Adams Graphic Adventure Series (Adventures Int'l) AP, AT

Time Zone (Sierra-on-Line) AP

Transylvania (Penguin) AP, AT, C64, MAC

All-Text

Zork I, II, III (Infocom) all systems

Suspended (Infocom) all systems

Deadline (Infocom) all systems

SIMULATIONS

RAILS WEST

Fiendishly complex, and detailed to the point of obscurity, *Rails West* will nonetheless be loved by railroad enthusiasts, frustrated robber barons, and anyone who thinks computer games are too simple and flashy. The object is to amass a fortune in the railroad business of the 19th-century Western United States. Acting as individuals, or as directors of railroads in which they own a controlling interest, players buy and sell stocks and bonds, take out loans, build new rail lines, and even merge one company into another. The game is all text, except for a map that shows the status of railroad lines across the country. Players can also chart their progress on paper maps and balance sheets that come with the game. As Max Beerbohm said, "For those who like this sort of thing, it is the sort of thing they like."

—Jack Lechner
SSI, by Martin C. Campion; AP, AT, C64 (D); \$40

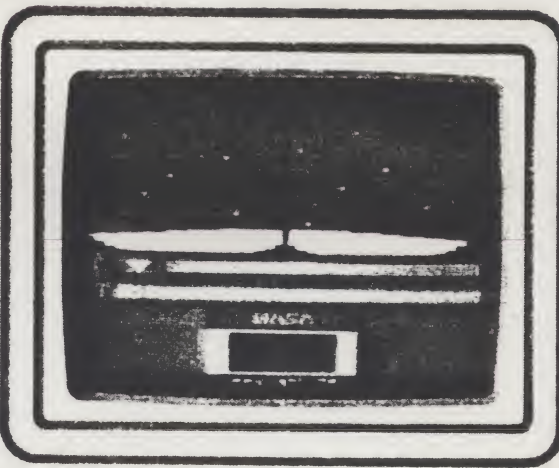
PRESIDENT ELECT

Curious to see whether Ted Kennedy might defeat George Bush for president? Whether Reagan would have beaten Carter in 1976? This mostly text game allows you to simulate any presidential election from 1960 to 1984, using the historical conditions or variant situations you determine.

Each week from Labor Day to Election Day, the computer gives you poll results and spending breakdowns for each candidate. As a candidate's campaign manager, you must choose how much to spend on advertising and where to spend it; how many appearances the candidate should make and where; whether to debate, and how to answer each question. The computer will play some, all, or none of the parts—and it can be a shrewd strategist. Die-hard political buffs can choose to finish the game with a real-time simulation of election night, lasting four hours, we prefer skipping ahead to the final tally.

—Jack Lechner
SSI, by Nelson G. Hernandez; AP, C64 (D) \$40.

SPACE SHUTTLE



PHOTOGRAPH BY KIMBERLY BUTLER

Some day in the not too distant future, seats on the NASA space shuttle will be available through your local travel agent. And on that inevitable day when the pilot slumps forward in her seat and the flight attendants ask if anyone knows how to fly a shuttle, a passenger will stifle a yawn and saunter casually into the cockpit. With a practiced hand, the passenger will dock the shuttle with an orbiting satellite, then return it safely to Earth. Upon receiving the Congressional Medal of Honor, the passenger will tell the nation that "It's nothing once you've mastered the Activision simulation."

—Jack Lechner
Activision, by Steve Kitchen; AP (D), C64 (D, C); AT, 2600, 5200 (C); \$35

FLIGHT SIMULATOR II

Playing this game is the closest you can come to flying a plane without having to eat airline food. It's all here, in laborious detail: the endless rows of dials and gauges, the radar, and your choice of cloud positions, seasons, and wind speeds. You even have machine guns and bombs, if you're playing the "World War I Ace" variation. Graphics are excellent, with three-dimensional terrain of most of the U.S. to fly over. It takes a while to learn to fly

without crashing—but aren't you lucky to be able to make mistakes that pilots can't afford?

—Jack Lechner
Sublogic, by Bruce Artwick; AP, AT, C64 (D); \$50.

RUN FOR THE MONEY

This solid introduction to basic economic principles is also a lot of fun. You're a Bizling who's stranded on the planet Simian until you can cover your spaceship with protective paint. To get the money to buy the paint at auction, you can sell "synannas"—synthetic bananas—to the Simians who swing overhead. Synannas are made from "rufs," which you can buy from Ruffians at the Ruffhouses. And there's another Bizling in the same predicament—either the computer or a human opponent—who competes with you for paint, rufs, and synanna customers. The game demonstrates the law of supply and demand, the effectiveness of timely advertising, and the role of competition. If you want to win, go for the paint every chance you get.

—Jack Lechner
Scarborough, by Tom Snyder; AP, AT, C64, IBM, MAC (D); \$50.

GATO

GATO is a first-rate submarine simulation, placing you in command of a World War II American sub trying to sink enemy ships in the South Pacific. The attractive graphics (not as clear on the PCjr) display your instrument panel and periscope view, a radar screen, charts of your patrol area and quadrant, and—if you don't dive quickly after a destroyer spots you—a damage report.

The controls are simple to understand and maneuver; it's the requisite strategy and skill that make GATO a real challenge. Your opponents can be tricky, even to the extent of sending false orders to trap you deep in their waters. Take the advice of Admiral Halsey: "Hit hard, hit fast, hit often."

—Jack Lechner
Spectrum HoloByte, by Paul Arlton and Ed Dawson, IBM (D); \$40

This Month	Last Month	Mos. On Chart	Entertainment	Systems								
				AT	AP	COM	IBM	TRS	DEC	TI	CPM	MISC.
1	1	10	ZORK I—Infocom One of the first computer adventure games, Zork puts the player in a mythical adventure scenario. More than 80 locations are included. But watch out—the troll will eat whatever you throw at it.	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•
2	3	17	CHOPLIFTER—Broderbund Player is the pilot of a helicopter that must rescue four groups of hostages in a foreign land. Tanks, jet fighters, and air mines all attempt to stop the rescue mission—which gets harder every time the player goes back to rescue another load of hostages. Hi-resolution and simulated 3-D graphics are used.	•	•	•						
3	2	7	ZAXXON—Datasoft The arcade and videogame hit comes to the home computer world. As usual, the object is to maneuver your ship past the dangers of space fortresses and destroy Zaxxon himself.	•	•			•				
4	4	5	ZORK II—Infocom Zork I fanatics will appreciate this new version of the original computer adventure game. Mythical adventure scenarios are included and as many dangers along the way.	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•
	8	12	FROGGER—Sierra On-Line The loveable frog of arcade fame comes to computers. Player must maneuver the frog over a variety of obstacles—including a busy highway. The frog does get his reward, however—if you can help him catch flies.	•	•	•	•					
6	6	7	TEMPLE OF APSHAI—Epyx One of the first role-playing adventure games, it involves a four-level dungeon. Player wanders through, building character strength in an attempt to gather all 20 treasures. A local innkeeper sells you weapons, armor and healing salves.	•	•	•	•	•				
	10	2	BLUE MAX—Synapse The player is the pilot of a World War I bi-plane flying over occupied terrain. Featuring diagonal scrolling, ground to air firing and three-dimensional strafing runs, the wartime realism and excitement is hard to beat.	•								
8	5	20	CASTLE WOLFENSTEIN—Muse You're a soldier during World War II, and have been brought back for interrogation. You're secretly handed a loaded pistol by a dying cellmate, and must then capture hidden war plans in the castle—without being shot or recaptured.	•	•							
9	—	—	PLANETFALL—Infocom A game in which players join the Stellar Patrol, and tour the galaxy. After a routine tour of duty, players are suddenly confronted with a series of dangerous adventures—meeting strange persons and creatures from other worlds, all in a text adventure format.	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•
10	9	22	WIZARDRY—Sir-Tech You can choose from 5 races and 8 professions to create up to 6 characters, each with their own strengths and weaknesses. These characters explore a dungeon, fighting groups of monsters, casting spells, finding treasure and magic items, and amazing clues to solve the puzzle presented in each scenario.		•							

AT—Atari • AP—Apple • COM—Commodore • IBM—IBM • TRS—Tandy Radio Shack • DEC—Digital Equipment Corp.

TI—Tandy Instruments • CPM—CP/M • MISC.—Miscellaneous

Be software programs across the country based on retail sales volume as surveyed by Eastman Publishing.

Steve

BEST SELLERS

ENTERTAINMENT

This Month	Last Month	Mos. on Chart	Title - Manufacturer	Systems						
				Apple	Atari	Commodore	IBM	Texas Instruments	CP/M	Other
1	4	7	ZORK II - Infocom	•	•	•	•	•	•	•
2	1	12	ZORK I - Infocom	•	•	•	•	•	•	•
3	3	9	ZAXXON - Datasoft	•	•					•
4	17	3	ULTIMA III - Origin Systems	•	•					
5	12	4	LODE RUNNER - Broderbund	•	•	•				
6	14	13	DEADLINE - Infocom	•	•	•	•	•	•	•
7	2	19	CHOPLIFTER - Broderbund	•	•	•				
8	11	9	ZORK III - Infocom	•	•	•	•	•	•	•
9	8	22	CASTLE WOLFENSTEIN - Muse	•	•					
10	10	24	WIZARDRY - Sir-Tech	•			•			
11	9	3	PLANETFALL - Infocom	•	•	•	•	•	•	•
12	15	3	LEGACY OF LLYLGAMYN - Sir-Tech	•						
13	—	9	FLIGHT SIMULATOR - Microsoft				•			
14	16	3	PINBALL CONSTRUCTION SET - Electronic Arts	•	•					
15	5	14	FROGGER - Sierra On-Line	•	•	•	•			
16	—	5	ULTIMA II - Sierra On-Line	•	•		•			
17	6	9	TEMPLE OF APSHAI - Epyx	•	•	•	•			•
18	20	3	STAR LEAGUE BASEBALL - Gamestar		•					
19	NEW		ENCHANTER - Infocom	•	•		•	•		•
20	NEW		SPY'S DEMISE - Penguin	•						

Best-selling software programs across the country based on retail sales volume as surveyed by Eastman Publishing.

Billboard Computer Software

Survey for Week Ending 10/8/83

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ENTERTAINMENT TOP 20

This Week	Last Week	Weeks on Chart	Title	Manufacturer	Remarks	Systems	Apple	Atari	Commodore	IBM	Texas Instruments	TRS	CP/M	Other
1			ZORK I	Broderbund	Text Adventure Game		•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•
2			BLUE MAX	Synapse	Dungeon Scrolling Arcade Game			••						
3			CHOPFLITER	Broderbund	Arcade Style Game		•	••	•					
4			ZAXXON	DataSoft	Arcade Style Game		•	••				••		
5			FROGGER	Sierra On-Line	Arcade Game		•	••	••	•				
6			LODE RUNNER	Broderbund	Arcade Style Game		•	•						
7			LEGACY OF THE LILYGAMYN	Sir Tech	Adventure Game		•							
8			FORT APOCALYPSE	Synapse	Scrolling Arcade Game			•••	••					
9			MINER 2049er	Bg Five	Arcade Game			•						
10			DONKEY KONG	Atari	Arcade Game			•	•	•	•			
11			PINBALL CONSTRUCTION SET	Electronic Arts	Educational Arcade Game		•	•						
12			WIZARDRY	Sir Tech	Fantasy Role-Playing Game		•							
13			TEMPLE OF APSHAI	Epyx	Action Strategy Game		•	••	••	•				
14			PLANET FALL	Amicom	Text Adventure Game		•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•
15			ULTIMA II	Sierra On-Line	Fantasy Adventure Game		•	•						
16			JUMPMAN	Epyx	Action Strategy Game		•	••	••	•				
17			HARD HAT MACK	Electronic Arts	Arcade Style Game		•	•						
18			EXODUS: ULTIMA III	Origin Systems Inc.	Fantasy Role-Playing Game		•							
19			CASTLE WOLFENSTEIN	Muse	Arcade Adventure Game		•	•						
20			WITNESS	Intuition	Text Adventure Game		•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•

EDUCATION TOP 10

1			MASTER TYPE	Lightning	Educational program that teaches touch typing to ages 7 to adult in an exciting video game format in 15 different lessons.	•	•	•	•					
2			FACE MAKER	Spinaker	3 part learning game designed to teach very young children (age 4-12) the computer keyboard & memory skills by asking them to work with a human face.	•	••	••	•					
3			COMPUTER SAT	Harcourt, Brace & Jovanovich	Educational program designed to prepare high school students and adults for the SAT (Scholastic Aptitude Test).	•	•					•		
4			IN SEARCH OF THE MOST AMAZING THING	Spinaker	Learning adventure that encourages problem-solving & sharpens the mind of the player, age 10 to adult who searches for the most amazing thing.	•	•	•	•					
5			EARLY GAMES	Counterpoint Software, Inc.	No adult supervision & friendly interactive package composed of 9 educational, entertaining games designed for children age 2 1/2 to 6.	•	••	••	•			••		
6			KINDERCOMP	Spinaker	Collection of 6 fun learning games designed to prepare young children age 3-8 to read, spell & count while also familiarizing them with the keyboard.	•	••	••	•					
7			STORY MACHINE	Spinaker	Learning game that helps children (age 5-8) write sentences, paragraphs and simple stories. The story is then animated on the screen & can be saved.	•	••	••	•					
8			ALGEBRA I	EdWare & MSA Co.	Teaches basic definitions, number line operations, sets & equation reduction rules. Part 1 of 6 volume series covering first year course in Algebra.	•								
9			TYPING TUTOR	Microsoft	Interactive educational typing program designed for ages 7 to adult.	•								
10			THE GAME SHOW	Computer Advanced Ideas	Educational program that teaches information, vocabulary and essential thinking skills in a game of clues and target concepts. Age 6 to adult.	•								

HOME MANAGEMENT TOP 10

1			THE HOME ACCOUNTANT	Continental	Home & Small Business Financial Management Program	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•
2			BANK STREET WRITER	Broderbund	Word Processing Package	•	•							
3			PFS:FILE	Software Publishing	Information Management System	•					•	•		
4			ATARIWRITER	Atari	Word Processing Program		•							
5			HES WRITER	HesWare	Word Processing Program				•					
6			PRACTICALC	Computer Software Associates	Electronic Spreadsheet				••					
7			PFS:WRITE	Software Publishing	Word Processing Package	•					•			
8			PFS:REPORT	Software Publishing	Information Management System	•					•	•		
9			WORDPRO 3	Professional Software	Word Processing Package				•					
10			SENSIBLE SPELLER	Sensible	Word Processing Spelling Checker	•								

• Disk (Dot) • cartridge (Diamond) ★ Cassette (Star)

Now Playing Home Games From & About The Arcade

By FAYE ZUCKERMAN

Really cute, Broderbund's "Spare Change" by Dan and Mike Zeller on the Apple IIe computer makes good use of animation. The object of the game is to keep two entertaining "Zerks" around the "Spare Change Arcade." Each time the player collects enough tokens—before the Zerks can get any—the player receives a slapstick-like cartoon show from the two characters.

During the game play, when a jukebox, which takes one token, is played, the Zerks are drawn to it and start to dance to the music. On higher levels of the game the popcorn maker can be started up.

Additionally, players can reprogram the game to change its difficulty levels. If, for example, one toggles the bumping meter, the more likely it is the Zerks will bump into each other. Sound, pauses and cartoons can be adjusted. One can skip the cartoons altogether to get continuous game play.

★ ★ ★

Making a comeback—arcade, home, action. Coming this fall from Sega Enterprises Inc. are several new game titles converted from arcade titles. "Star Trek," "Buck Rogers, Planets Of Zoom" and "Congo Bongo"—currently highly rated arcade games—will be released in November. And, according to a spokeswoman for the company, the titles will be supported by a \$5 million advertising budget.

Sega's fall promotion is somewhat of an attempt by the faltering company to make a comeback. It recently sold its domestic coin-operated game manufacturing facility to Bally Manufacturing, one of the largest arcade game operators. Sega now markets video games for the home, while Bally will take charge of coin-operated machines.

Bally at one time marketed a home-arcade machine, but closed up its home video game operation late in 1982, just when many of the major video game hardware companies announced staggering losses. Now, however, the companies are hoping for a comeback.

Says Stanley Harfenist, executive vice president of Sega Consumer Products, "Sega, Paramount Pictures and Bally will combine efforts in the research and development of video game hardware and software, the products of which will be manufactured and distributed as coin-operated games by Bally and as consumer games by Sega."

★ ★ ★

Activision action. The Mountain View-based entertainment software company has introduced "River Raid" and "KABOOM!" for the Atari 5200 video game system. The games' original formats were for the 2600 system. The titles will cost about \$34.95. These titles should be out by Christmas.

Additionally, "Beamrider," by Dave Rolfe, becomes the fifth Activision game to be made for the Intellivision system by Mattel. Its suggested retail price is \$34.95.

Finally, the captivating "Frostbite," by Steve Cartwright, may emerge as a top-seller for Activision. Game action involves "Qbert"-like (Continued on page 63)

Billboard
Computer Software
Survey for Week Ending 11/26/83

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ENTERTAINMENT TOP 20

—Disk —Cartridge ★—Cassette

This Week	Last Week	Weeks on Chart	Title	Manufacturer	Remarks	Systems	Apple	Atari	Commodore	IBM	Texas Instruments	TRS	CP/M	Other
1	1	8	LODE RUNNER	Broderbund	Arcade-Style Game		•	•	•					
2	2	8	ZORK I	Infocom	Text Adventure Game		•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•
3	5	8	CHOPFLIFTER	Broderbund	Arcade-Style Game		•	◆	◆					
4	6	8	ZAXXON	Datasoft	Arcade-Style Game		•	★★				★★		
5	3	8	LEGACY OF THE LLYLGAMYN	Sir-Tech	Adventure Game		•							
6	4	8	BLUE MAX	Synapse	Diagonal Scrolling Arcade Game			★★	★★					
7	7	8	PINBALL CONSTRUCTION SET	Electronic Arts	Educational Arcade Game		•	•	•					
8	8	8	WIZARDRY	Sir-Tech	Fantasy Role-Playing Game		•							
9	9	8	MINER 2049er	Big Five	Arcade Game			◆						
10	11	8	FROGGER	Sierra On-Line	Arcade Game		•	★★	★★	•				
11	18	2	ENCHANTER	Infocom	Text Adventure Game		•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•
12	19	8	CASTLE WOLFENSTEIN	Muse	Arcade Adventure Game		•	•						
13	10	8	TEMPLE OF APISHA	Epyx	Fantasy Role-Playing Game		•	★★	★★	•				
14	14	8	PLANET FALL	Infocom	Text Adventure Game		•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•
15	15	8	JUMPMAN	Epyx	Action Strategy Game		•	★★	★★	•				
16	16	8	HARD HAT MACK	Electronic Arts	Arcade-Style Game		•	•	•					
17	13	5	ARCHON	Electronic Arts	Strategy Arcade Game			•	•					
18	12	8	FORT APOCALYPSE	Synapse	Scrolling Arcade Game			★★◆	★★					
19	17	5	STAR LEAGUE BASEBALL	Gamestar	Arcade-Style Game			★★						
20	NEW ENTRY		EXODUS ULTIMA III	Origins Systems Inc.	Fantasy Role-Playing Game		•							

EDUCATION TOP 10

1	1	8	MASTERTYPE	Scarborough	Educational program that teaches touch typing to ages 7 to adult in an exciting video game format in 18 different lessons.	•	•	•	•					
2	2	8	FACEMAKER	Spinaker	3 part learning game designed to teach very young children (age 4-12) the computer keyboard & memory skills by asking them to work with a human face.	•	◆	◆	◆	•				
3	3	8	EDUCATION COMP	Spiralbound	Fun for 6 fun learning game for young children ages 3-6. Speed to prepare, speed to play & count while.	•	◆	◆	◆	•				

Billboard® Computer Software

Survey for Week Ending 12/3/83

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ENTERTAINMENT TOP 20

●—Disk ◆—Cartridge ★—Cassette

This Week	Last Week	Weeks on Chart	Title	Manufacturer	Remarks	Systems	Apple	Atari	Commodore	IBM	Texas Instruments	TRS	CP/M	Other
1	1	9	LODE RUNNER	Broderbund	Arcade-Style Game		●	●	●					
2	2	9	ZORK I	Infocom	Text Adventure Game		●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
3	3	9	CHOPLIFTER	Broderbund	Arcade-Style Game		●	◆	◆					
4	4	9	ZAXXON	Datasoft	Arcade-Style Game		●	●★				●★		
5	6	9	BLUE MAX	Synapse	Diagonal Scrolling Arcade Game			●★	●★					
6	7	9	PINBALL CONSTRUCTION SET	Electronic Arts	Educational Arcade Game		●	●	●					
7	10	9	FROGGER	Sierra On-Line	Arcade Game		●	●★	●★	●				
8	5	9	LEGACY OF THE LLYLGAMYN	Sir-Tech	Adventure Game		●							
9	8	9	WIZARDRY	Sir-Tech	Fantasy Role-Playing Game		●							
10	12	9	CASTLE WOLFENSTEIN	Muse	Arcade Adventure Game		●	●						
11	15	9	JUMPMAN	Epyx	Action Strategy Game		●	●★	●★	●				
12	13	9	TEMPLE OF APSHAI	Epyx	Fantasy Role-Playing Game		●	●★	●★	●				
13	9	9	MINER 2049er	Big Five	Arcade Game			◆						
14	20	2	EXODUS ULTIMA III	Origins Systems Inc.	Fantasy Role-Playing Game		●							
15	16	9	HARD HAT MACK	Electronic Arts	Arcade-Style Game		●	●	●					
16	14	9	PLANET FALL	Infocom	Text Adventure Game		●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
17	11	3	ENCHANTER	Infocom	Text Adventure Game		●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
18	14	9	FORT APOCALYPSE	Synapse	Scrolling Arcade Game			●★◆	●★					
19	19	6	STAR LEAGUE BASEBALL	Gamestar	Arcade-Style Game			●★						
20	17	6	ARCHON	Electronic Arts	Strategy Arcade Game			●	●					

EDUCATION TOP 10

1	1	9	MASTERTYPE	Scarborough	Educational program that teaches touch typing to ages 7 to adult in an exciting video game format in 18 different lessons.		●	●	●	●				
2	2	9	FACEMAKER	Spinnaker	3 part learning game designed to teach very young children (age 4-12) the computer keyboard & memory skills by asking them to work with a human face.		●	◆	◆	●				
3	4	9	IN SEARCH OF THE MOST AMAZING THING	Spinnaker	Learning adventure that encourages problem-solving & sharpens the mind of the player (age 10 to adult) who searches for the most amazing thing.		●	●	●	●				
4	3	9	KINDERCOMP	Spinnaker	Collection of 6 fun learning games designed to prepare young children age 3-8 to read, spell & count while also familiarizing them with the keyboard.		●	◆	◆	●				
5	7	9	EARLY GAMES	Counterpoint Software, Inc.	No adult supervision & friendly interactive package composed of 9 educational, entertaining games designed for children age 2½ to 6.		●	●★	●★	●		●★		
6	5	5	STORY MACHINE	Spinnaker	Learning game that helps children (age 5-9) write sentences, paragraphs and simple stories. The story is then animated on the screen & can be saved.		●	◆	◆	●				
7	8	8	TYPE ATTACK	Sirius	Invader-style educational typing game with multilevel screens designed for ages 6 to adult.		●	●	◆					
8	10	6	TYPING TUTOR	Microsoft	Interactive educational typing program designed for ages 7 to adult.		●							
9	9	9	ALGEBRA I	Edu-Ware & MSA Co.	Teaches basic definitions, number line operations, sets & equation reduction rules. Part 1 of 6 volume series covering first-year course in Algebra.		●			●				
10	6	9	COMPUTER SAT	Harcourt, Brace & Jovanovich	Educational program designed to prepare high school students and adults for the SAT (Scholastic		●	●		●		●		

This wire. rapidly into its new computers are entered into Factor "Coh" "Ardu Creat

"Tis Brode on the gram, comp the pu The rebate crease Run board the t specia Als make tion. three with ple I went

From Micr try in ware be pr cro new be m mode comp

Pe arati comp PCj durin a re mis. mak hom butio stud like Pro. 10% can com men T soft

After a slow start last year, IBM's national accounts folks got their act together and sold tons of machines this year. Because of this effort, IBM is the clear winner in sales for the year 1983. But all that gives Big Blue is parity in terms of an installed user base.

With both companies readying new entries for 1984, there can be no real assurance that IBM can repeat its dominance of this year. The pundits are unanimous in assuming it will, and with good reason. But Apple has a couple of tricks left up its sleeve that at least warrant consideration before awarding the unchallenged emperorship of microcomputing to IBM.

So why the flimflam? Why have the media and the market watchers been crowning IBM so prematurely? Why hasn't at least one clear-thinking journalist come forth to announce that the emperor has no clothes? If events continue as they are going, IBM will earn the mantle of lead-

Adventure 5

This Month Last Month

1. 1. **Zork I**, Infocom
2. 5. **The Quest**, Dallas Snell, Joe Toler, and Joel Ellis Rea, Penguin Software
3. — **Enchanter**, Infocom
4. 4. **Planetfall**, Steve Meretzky, Infocom
5. — **Masquerade**, Dale Johnson, Phoenix Software

Strategy 5

This Month Last Month

1. 4. **Flight Simulator**, Bruce Artwick, SubLogic
2. 1. **Castle Wolfenstein**, Silas Warner, Muse
3. 4. **Sargon II**, Dan and Kathe Spracklen, Hayden Software
4. — **Geopolitique 1990**, Bruce Ketchledge, Strategic Simulations
5. 2. **Broadsides**, Wayne Garris, Strategic Simulations

Fantasy 5

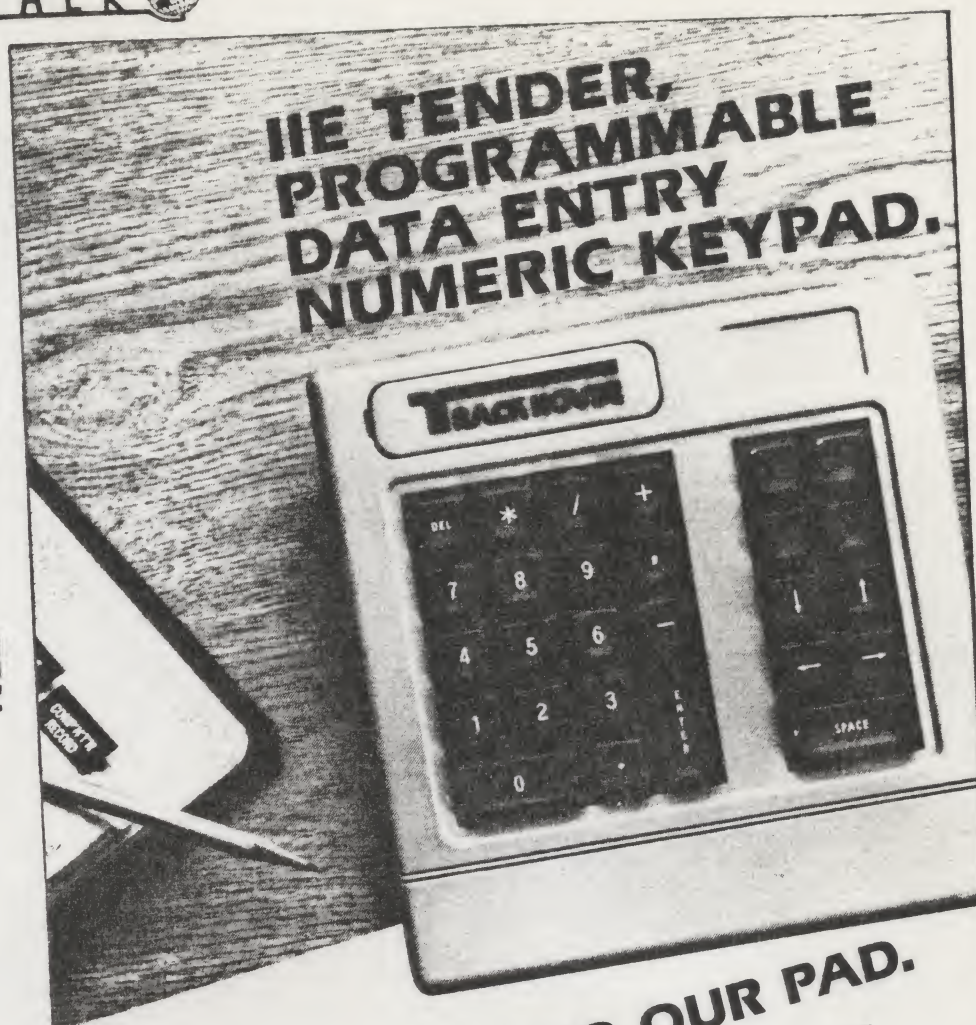
This Month Last Month

1. 1. **Legacy of Llylgamyn**, Andrew Greenberg and Robert Woodhead, Sir-tech
2. 3. **Wizardry**, Andrew Greenberg and Robert Woodhead, Sir-tech
3. 2. **Exodus: Ultima III**, Lord British, Origin Systems
4. 5. **Knight of Diamonds**, Andrew Greenberg and Robert Woodhead, Sir-tech
5. 4. **Ultima II**, Lord British, Sierra On-Line

ership during December. That's soon enough to pronounce it king. Why the media all proclaimed it and why the public all bought it six months ago would make an interesting case study in the psychology of market hysteria.

In the meantime, maybe the children's tale about the emperor's new clothes should be made mandatory reading at a high school or college level. It would be nice to think the average American journalist or interested spectator could spot a naked emperor at ten paces.

The Apple software market seems to be undergoing rapid change, with entertainment software on the downturn, both in percentage of mon-



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Dec. '83

HOTWARE

A Look At This Month's Best Sellers And The Software Industry

Kathy Yakal, Editorial Assistant

This Month		Last Month	This Month		Last Month
Commodore 64 Entertainment			VIC-20 Entertainment		
1	<i>Jumpman</i> (Epyx)	1	1	<i>Gridrunner</i> (HesWare)	1
2	<i>Fort Apocalypse</i> (Synapse)	4	2	<i>Choplifter</i> (Creative)	6
3	<i>Temple of Apshai</i> (Epyx)	5	3	<i>Shamus</i> (HesWare)	—
4	<i>Frogger</i> (Sierra On-Line)	2	4	<i>Temple of Apshai</i> (HesWare)	—
5	<i>Neutral Zone</i> (Access)	—	5	<i>Kongo Kong</i> (Victory)	—
6	<i>Sword of Fargoal</i> (Epyx)	6	6	<i>Paratrooper</i> (Computer Mat)	—
7	<i>Gridrunner</i> (HesWare)	3	7	<i>Exterminator</i> (Nüfekop)	—
8	<i>Supercuda</i> (CommData)	8	8	<i>Robbers of the Lost Tomb</i> (Timeworks)	—
9	<i>Telengard</i> (Avalon Hill)	7	9	<i>Predator</i> (HesWare)	—
10	<i>Planetfall</i> (Infocom)	—	10	<i>Amok</i> (UMI)	2
Commodore 64 Home/Business/Utility			VIC-20 Home/Business/Utility		
1	<i>WordPro 3 Plus/64</i> (Professional)	1	1	<i>Quick Brown Fox</i> (Quick Brown Fox)	1
2	<i>Quick Brown Fox</i> (Quick Brown Fox)	3	2	<i>Turtle Graphics</i> (HesWare)	—
3	<i>Inventory Manager</i> (Timeworks)	4	3	<i>HES Writer</i> (HesWare)	2
4	<i>PractiCalc</i> (Micro Software International)	—	4	<i>HES Mon</i> (HesWare)	3
5	<i>Money Manager</i> (Timeworks)	5	5	<i>Household Finance</i> (Creative)	5
6	<i>Electronic Checkbook</i> (Timeworks)	—	6	<i>Home Office</i> (Creative)	—
7	<i>Household Finance</i> (Creative)	7	7	<i>VIC Forth</i> (HesWare)	—
8	<i>PaperClip</i> (Batteries Included)	—	VIC-20 Educational		
9	<i>TOTL Text</i> (TOTL)	6	1	<i>Touch Typing Tutor</i> (Taylormade)	2
10	<i>Turtle Graphics</i> (HesWare)	2	2	<i>Type Attack</i> (Sirius)	—
11	<i>M File</i> (M Soft)	—	3	<i>English Invaders</i> (CommData)	4
Commodore 64 Educational			4	<i>Hangman/Hangmath</i> (Creative)	—
1	<i>KinderComp</i> (Spinnaker)	—	5	<i>Gotcha Math Games</i> (CommData)	—
2	<i>Touch Typing Tutor</i> (Taylormade)	—			
3	<i>Up For Grabs</i> (Spinnaker)	—			
4	<i>Facemaker</i> (Spinnaker)	1			
5	<i>Primary Math Tutor</i> (CommData)	—			
6	<i>Alphabet Zoo</i> (Spinnaker)	—			
7	<i>Typing Tutor</i> (Academy)	—			
8	<i>Hey Diddle Diddle</i> (Spinnaker)	—			

HOTWARE

A Look At This Month's Best Sellers And The Software Industry

Kathy Yakal, Editorial Assistant

This Month	Last Month	This Month	Last Month
Commodore 64 Entertainment		VIC-20 Entertainment	
1	2	1	1
2	3	2	3
3	4	3	4
4	1	4	3
5	6	5	5
6	7	6	7
7	8	7	-
8	5		
9	-		
10	-		
Commodore 64 Home/Business/Utility		VIC-20 Home/Business/Utility	
1	1	1	1
2	2	2	2
3	-	3	5
4	10	4	4
5	3	5	-
6	9	6	-
7	4		
8	-		
9	-		
10	-		
Commodore 64 Educational		VIC-20 Educational	
1	5	1	1
2	1	2	3
3	-	3	-
4	2	4	-
5	3	5	2
6	4		
7	-		
8	7		

9/10/84

SOFTSEAL®

This Week	Last Week	Weeks on Chart	RECREATION	This Week
1	1	89	Flight Simulator II • Sublogic • C64, AP	1
2	3	105	Zork I • Infocom • CP/M, AP, DEC, IBM, AT, MAC, TIP	2
3	2	18	Summer Games • Epyx • AP, C64, AT	3
4	4	85	Flight Simulator • Microsoft • IBM	4
5	5	47	Millionaire • Bluechip • MAC, AP, C64, IBM, AT	5
6	6	58	Lode Runner • Broderbund • AT, C64, IBM, AP	6
7	11	90	Frogger • Sierra On-Line • IBM, AT, AP, C64, MAC	7
8	7	42	Ultima III • Origin Systems • AP, AT, IBM, C64	8
9	9	105	Wizardry • Sir-Tech Software • IBM, AP	9
10	10	27	Planetfall • Infocom • TRS, MAC, IBM, CP/M, AP, DEC, AT, C64	10
11	8	41	Sargon III • Hayden Software • AP, C64, IBM, MAC	11
12	12	38	Witness • Infocom • AT, DEC, C64, AP, MAC, IBM, TRS, TIP	12
13	14	16	Transylvania • Penguin Software • AP, MAC	13
14	22	11	 Seastalker • Infocom • MAC, C64, IBM, AP, AT	14
15	17	44	Suspended • Infocom • TIP, AP, IBM, C64, MAC, AT, TRS	15
16	19	2	World's Greatest Baseball Game • Epyx • C64	16
17	24	2	 International Soccer • Commodore • C64	17
18	18	14	Beyond Castle Wolfenstein • Muse Company • C64, APc	18
19	—	16	 BC's Quest for Tires • Sierra On-Line • AT, AP, C64, IBM, PCjr	19
20	15	22	Sorcerer • Infocom • C64, MAC, TRS, AT, IBM, AP	20
21	13	43	Enchanter • Infocom • TRS, TIP, AT, IBM, DEC, AP, C64	21
22	21	101	Zork II • Infocom • TRS, DEC, IBM, AP, AT, CP/M, TIP, MAC	22
23	16	11	Beach Head • Access Software • AT, C64	23
24	25	4	Run for the Money • Scarborough • AT, IBM, MAC, C64	24
25	23	40	Donkey Kong • Atarisoft • AT, IBM, AP, C64	25
26	28	103	Deadline • Infocom • DEC, IBM, TRS, AT, C64, CP/M, TIP, MAC, AP	26
27	—	79	Snooper Troops #1 • Spinnaker • C64, IBM, AT, AP	27
28	—	79	"Night Mission" Pinball • Sublogic • C64, IBM, AT, AP	28
29	27	63	Pac Man • Atarisoft • AT, C64, IBM, AP	29
30	—	9	Questron • Strategic Simulations • AP, AT	30

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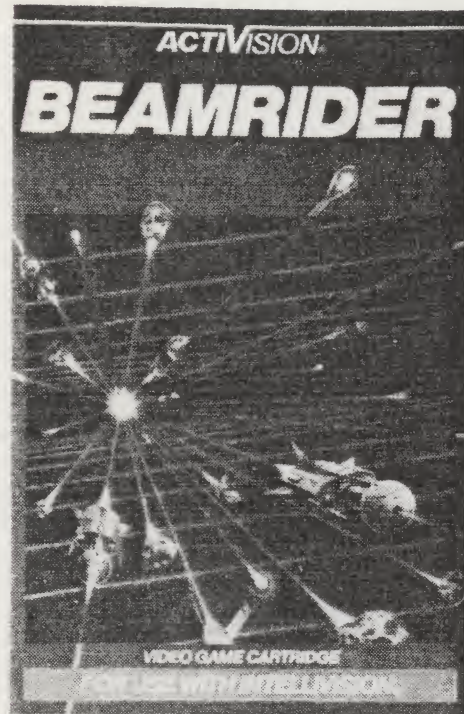
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GAME CARTRIDGES

ADVANCED DUNGEONS AND DRAGONS: TREASURES OF TARMIN.

★★★ Mattel for Intellivision. \$35.00. Second cartridge in the popular fantasy-role-playing game series, even more complex and strategy-oriented than the first, *Cloudy Mountain*. Puts Intellivision system to the ultimate workout, and very playable.



□ **BEAMRIDER.** ★★ Activision for Intellivision. Designed by Dave Rolfe. \$34.95. Player guides his space ship along a grid of light beams, shooting down enemy saucers and avoiding vari-colored blockers, trackers, chargers, streakers and chirpers.

□ **CRASH DIVE** ★ Fox Games for Atari VCS. Designed by Bill Aspromonte. \$14.95. A flying-submarine game, with treasures, monsters and enemies galore. Not nearly as good as Imagic's similar vidgame, *Fathom*.

□ **FATHOM** ★★ Imagic for Atari VCS. \$35.00. Player can metamorph from dolphin to seagull, grabbing for pink seahorses and clouds while searching for the three pieces of a trident to free Neptune from her watery prison. Great fun, good graphics.

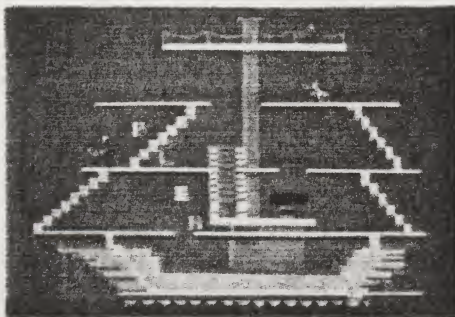
□ **FROSTBITE** ★★ Activision for Atari VCS. Designed by Steve Cartwright. \$31.95. A jumping game, a bit like top-selling *Q*bert*, with player hopping from ice-flow to ice-flow, avoiding grizzly bears, Alaskan king crabs, low-flying snow geese and killer clams as he/she seeks to build an igloo (which conveniently constructs itself one block per hop).

□ **JOUST** ★★ Atari for its VCS (\$35.45), 5200 (\$40.95), and home computers (\$49.95). Player is a knight astride an ostrich, trying to turn his buzzard-riding opponent into "seemingly harmless eggs." Watch out for the pterodactyl, of course, as well as assorted flash fires and volcanic eruptions.

□ **LASER GATES** ★★ Imagic for Atari VCS (\$35.00) and home computers (\$40.00) Laser-dodging game, with rock-hurling aliens and flying demons thrown in for good measure.

□ **MINER 2049er** ★★ Micro Lab for ColecoVision. Designed by Bill Hogue. \$49.95. First vidgame version of the popular home computer climbing game.

□ **MOON PATROL** ★★ Atari for 5200 (\$40.95) and home computers (\$49.95). Players drive a dune buggy over the craggy surface of the moon, zapping and avoiding tanks and spaceships as they go. Good graphics.

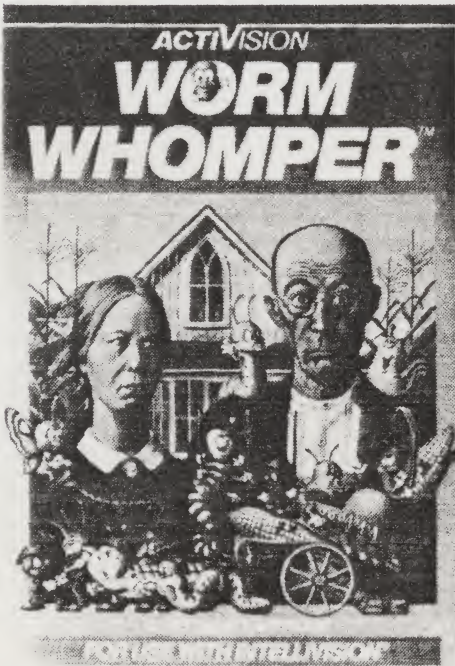


□ **POPEYE** ★★ Parker Bros. for Intellivision (\$30.00) and Atari home computers (\$40.00). Adaptations of the popular Nintendo arcade game. The Intellivision graphics, though blocky-looking, are more appealing than the ones for Atari computer, though the latter is eminently more playable. Basically a climbing/grabbing game.

□ **PRESSURE COOKER** ★★ Activision for Atari VCS. Designed by Garry Kitchen. \$34.95. A hamburger-building fast-food game requiring organizational skills as well as a quick trigger-finger. Different enough from *Burgertime* to rate a giggle.

□ **SPACE SHUTTLE** ★★ Activision for Atari VCS. Designed by Steve Kitchen. \$34.95. One of the most complex games ever designed for the Atari VCS, the game simulates actual blastoff, flight and reentry situations, turning your VCS into a whole space ship control board. Very much a strategy/simulation game — definitely not a laser-blaster.

□ **WAR ROOM** ★★ N.A.P. Consumer Electronics for ColecoVision. \$35.00. Complex game combining strategy and quick action as the player tries to protect U.S. cities from being bombed by enemy satellites, while keeping an eye on their laser fuel, raw material and food supplies as well. Excellent multi- and split-screen graphics.



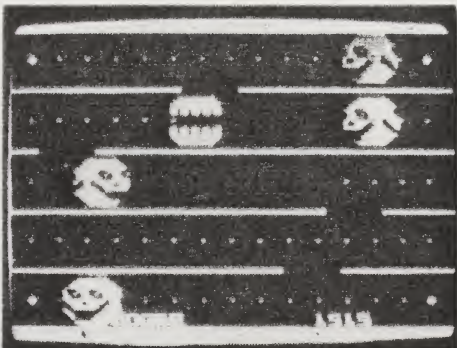
□ **WORM WHOMPER** ★★ Activision for Intellivision. Designed by Tom Loughry. \$34.95. Farmer Felton Pinkerton, armed only with a pesticide spray gun and an occasional "pulverizing plough ball," battles assorted creeping, crawling and flying horrors, trying to save his field of corn. One of the best games yet for Intellivision.

COMPUTER SOFTWARE

□ **ENCHANTER** ★★ Infocom for Apple, Atari, IBM PC, Commodore 64, TRS-80 1 & 3 and others. \$49.95. Text game, with the adventurer as a novice wizard, finding and using spells as he goes. In the tradition of the company's best-selling *Zork* series, written by the same authors, Marc Blank and Dave Lebling.

□ **GATEWAY TO APSHAI** ★★ Epyx for Atari. \$40.00. Pre-quel to the company's best-selling, classic *Dungeons-and-Dragons* type fantasy role playing game, *Temple of Apshai*. Has quicker action and joystick (rather than keyboard) movement control, but less strategy oriented and more simplistic than other games in this popular series.

□ **INFIDEL** ★★ Infocom for Apple, Atari, TRS-80, Commodore 64 and others. \$49.95. Text-adventuring in the pyramids of ancient Egypt, authored by Michael Berlyn, who did the cryogenic nightmare *Suspended* for the company.



□ **JAWBREAKER** ★★ Sierra-on-Line/Texas Instruments for TI99/4A. \$29.95. Popular *Pacman*-type arcade hit, with goblin gobblers.

□ **KABOOM!** ★★ Activision for Atari home computers. \$34.95. An upwardly mobile adaptation of the company's prize-winning and best-selling Atari VCS game where the player tries to catch lit cannonballs by maneuvering water buckets. Mindless fun.

□ **M*A*S*H** ★★ Texas Instruments for TI99/4A. \$29.95. Computer cartridge adaptation of the Fox Games version for Atari VCS. Has both helicopter rescue missions and surgery operations (after which the computer says "Thanks, Doc," if you have the TI speech synthesizer).

□ **MICROSURGEON** ★★ Texas Instruments for TI99/4A. \$29.95. The TI version is even better than Imagic's version for Intellivision. This Richard Levine-designed game has the player rushing to save the patient's life while zipping around inside his circulatory and lymphatic systems. The TI split-screen version makes it much easier to keep track of what's happening in all parts of the body at once.

□ **M.U.L.E.** ★★ Electronic Arts for Atari. \$40.00. Multi-player *Monopoly*-type game, with players staking out claims on a distant

planet. Probably the cleverest — and funniest — computer game to date, with wonderful playability on various levels of difficulty.

□ **MURDER ON THE ZINDERNEUF** ★★ Electronic Arts for Atari. \$40.00. Like the old board game *Clue*, but set on a blimp and programmed for computer.

□ **OIL BARONS** ★★ Epyx for Apple. \$40.00. One of the first attempts at merging computer games with old-fashioned board-strategy games. Comes boxed with board and playing pieces. A *Monopoly* for the '80s.

□ **PLANETFALL** ★★ Infocom for Apple, Atari, Commodore 64, TRS-80 and others. \$49.95. Tongue-in-cheek sci-fi adventure, in which you start as an ensign swabbing the deck of the stellar patrol. Once you hit the planet, you meet a mischievous robot named Floyd, with whom you have to learn to interact. Authored by Steven Meretzky, an obvious madman.

□ **RETURN TO PIRATE'S ISLE** ★★ Adventure International/Texas Instruments for TI99/4A. \$29.95. The 14th terrific adventure game by Scott Adams, who pioneered the concept for home computers. This is the first Adams adventure with graphics for TI, and only the TI version is available until January. It's a sequel to Adams' "Pirate Adventure," one of the best of the series.

□ **RIVER RAID** ★★ Activision for Atari home computers. \$34.95. Expanded version of Carol Shaw's popular VCS game of a plane flying over a river. Both graphics and sound effects have been expanded, and there are more obstacles than ever.

COMPUTER SOFTWARE TOP TEN ENTERTAINMENT PROGRAMS



These are the best selling computer software entertainment programs, available in disc, cartridge and/or cassette configuration, compiled from retail sales, including all the major home computer systems

1. **ZORK I** (Infocom) Text Adventure Game
2. **CHOPLIFTER** (Broderbund) Arcade-Style Game
3. **ZAXXON** (datasoft) Arcade-Style Game
4. **BLUE MAX** (Synapse) Diagonal Scrolling Arcade Game
5. **FORT APOCALYPSE** (Synapse) Scrolling Arcade Game
6. **LEGACY OF THE LLYLGAMYN** (Sir-Tech) Adventure Game
7. **JUMPMAN** (Epyx) Action Strategy Game
8. **LODE RUNNER** (Broderbund) Arcade-Style Game
9. **MINER 2049er** (Big Five) Arcade Game
10. **PLANET FALL** (Infocom) Text Adventure Game

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meet a mischievous robot named Floyd, with
whom you have to learn to interact. Authored
by Steven Meretzky, an obvious madman.

☐ **RETURN TO DINATC'S ICE**

Home Viewer, November 1983

Apple Cart, continued...

quick and powerful drawing and painting programs. Both can be used to create and edit graphics images pixel by pixel. The author includes his own extension to Pascal, Xtrastuff, which adds extra power and versatility. And for those who get lost, a comprehensive review of every Pascal command is included. 64K RAM is required along with the Apple Pascal Language System. From Hayden Publishing.

One unfortunate fact of computer use is that few packages can be integrated with others. Because of this, Bob Frankston of Software Arts developed the DIF format as a way of allowing easier integration. DIF, or Data Interchange Format, is not a product or software package that you buy. It is, rather a standard way of exchanging data between different computer programs. With DIF, data used in a *VisiCalc* spreadsheet can be used in a *DB Master* application or in *PFS: Graph*. Over 70 different software products use DIF.

The DIF File by Don Beil clears up many misconceptions about DIF and offers case studies on how to transfer data between different programs. This book should be on your shelves if you use any of the popular business packages avail-

able. \$15.95 from Reston Publishing.

Software

The first software I would recommend for anyone is anything from Beagle Bros. Everything they publish is topnotch. Utilities, games, graphics packages—all worth the money. In addition to a disk, you get a chart of PEAKS and POKES, a Tip Book or a Tips and Tricks chart. Every disk is unprotected, listable, and can be modified by the user. With so much junk being offered for sale these days, Beagle Bros. products are light-years ahead of the pack. Their products are the only ones I will buy *without* reading a review. Prices range from \$20 to \$39.50.

Another publisher I recommend without any hesitation is Infocom. From *Zork I* to *Planetfall*, each game is exciting, innovative, and addictive. All are pure text adventures—no graphics at all. You may have to search for an object, investigate a murder, or save an entire planet. These are not games you boot up and finish in an hour. Getting through one adventure can take many weeks. I am still trying to complete *Planetfall* after two weeks of play. If you want games that really challenge you, games which do not insult your intelligence or wallet,

try Infocom. Though a bit more expensive than the "twitch" games, you will get more enjoyment out of them. They exercise your mind, rather than your fingers.

Electronic Arts is one of the newest—and best—software publishers. My favorite game of the moment is *Hard Hat Mack*. Though nothing more than a chase game, the nice graphics and the novel premise make this a good game to give or receive. Mack is a construction worker menaced by vandals and an OSHA agent while he works on a high rise building. Mack must complete different sections of the building before moving on to higher levels. Timing is important in this game. You must time Mack's movements precisely on levels two and three. There are also definite patterns to this game. Figuring out these patterns is the first step in mastering *Hard Hat Mack*.

Do you do a lot of Basic programming? Are you spending more time editing and debugging than actually writing programs? *GALE*, the Global Applesoft Line Editor from MicroSparc, Inc., has been upgraded for the Apple IIe. *GALE* is a great help when writing and editing programs. It is almost like a word processor for programmers. You

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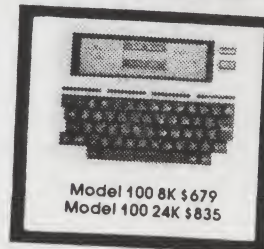
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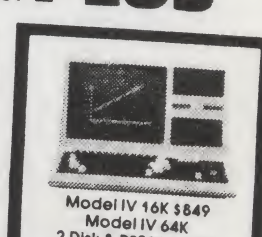
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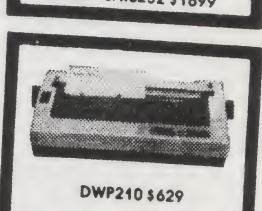
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F A S T A L K

Fastalk is a quick guide to popular, specialized, new, and classic software. When you need a particular kind of program or just want to see what's new, Fastalk is the place to look for fast answers.

If a program has been reviewed in *Softalk*, it carries the issue date of the review in italics at the end of its listing, and the capsule description given reflects the published review.

A new software entry, which must be of professional quality to be included, is designated by a check mark preceding its name. A new entry loses its check mark after its first appearance and drops out of Fastalk after one to three appearances (depending on genre) if it fails to gain popularity.

A bullet preceding a title indicates a program that *Softalk* has designated as a classic, based on its ability to stand up over time, its significance for its time (breaking new ground or introducing a new genre), or its archetypal qualities.

Other entries in Fastalk are there either by virtue of current activity (the programs are selling at least as much as the least-selling entry on any of the bestseller charts) or because they are representative of the best of programs for a special interest or need (such as card games or non-Basic-specific language terminal programs).

Softalk may arbitrarily omit any package from Fastalk, whether or not it meets the foregoing criteria.

Adventure

Adventuresome story games in which players must deduce commands, make maps, and solve logical puzzles.

● **Adventure.** Crowther, Woods. The original text adventure, created on mainframe, contributed to by many over a long time. Very logical within fantasy framework, excellent puzzles, maps; complex, convoluted, and great. Several publishers: Microsoft, 10700 Northup Wy., Bellevue, WA 98004. \$28.95. Apple, 20525 Mariani Ave., Cupertino, CA 95014. \$35. Frontier Computing, Box 402, 666 N. Main St., Logan, UT 84321. \$10.

The Coveted Mirror. Berns, Thomason. Nicely drawn characters, arcade subgames, and fun, logical puzzles enliven nonviolent medieval adventure. Humorous and animated. Penguin, Box 311, Geneva, IL 60134. \$19.95. 11/83.

Critical Mass. Blauschild. Rungistanian author's next adventure; more colorful graphics, sophisticated and challenging puzzles. Sirius, 10364 Rockingham Dr., Sacramento, CA 95827. \$39.95. 7/83.

● **Cyborg.** Berlyn. Text adventure with brief action skill game hidden in plot. As a futuristic part man, part robot, you're lost in a strange forest, desperately needing food and power. At its release, in its realism and use of true plot, *Cyborg* represented one of the most significant advances in adventuring since the original *Adventure*. Sentient, Box 4929, Aspen, CO 81612. \$32.95. 11/81.

Deadline. Blank, Lebling. Episode one in a series of murder mysteries by the authors of *Zork*. Includes inspector's casebook, lab report. Text. Infocom, 55 Wheeler St., Cambridge, MA 02138. \$49.95. 8/82.

Death in the Caribbean. Hess, Hess. Challenging quest for pirate treasure features a mischievous ghost, huge maze, lush graphics. Well worth it. Micro Lab, 2699 Skokie Valley Rd., Highland Park, IL 60035. \$35. 9/83.

Enchanter. Blank, Lebling. First of trilogy sequel to *Zork's* expands interaction with other charac-

ters, goes above ground, increases use of logical magic. No big breakthroughs, but simply delightful. Infocom, 55 Wheeler St., Cambridge, MA 02138. \$49.95. 9/83.

● **Hi-Res Adventure #1: Mystery House.** Williams. Whodunit in a Victorian mansion. First adventure with pictures. Two-word parser with logical comprehension. Sierra On-Line, Sierra On-Line Building, Coarsegold, CA 93614. \$24.95.

● **Hi-Res Adventure #2: The Wizard and the Princess.** Williams, Williams. The king has offered half his kingdom to the one who will bring back the kidnapped princess. Cross mountains, deserts; battle the wizard to claim your reward. Sierra On-Line, Sierra On-Line Building, Coarsegold, CA 93614. \$32.95. 11/80.

Infidel. Berlyn. Excellent puzzles and a surprising bad guy hero in well-written treasure hunt. Infocom, 55 Wheeler St., Cambridge, MA 02138. \$49.95. 11/83.

Masquerade. Johnson. Hard, logical, diabolically clever riddles in puzzle solver's *piece de resistance*. Great illustrations. Phoenix Software, 64 Lake Zurich Dr., Lake Zurich, IL 60047. \$34.95. 11/83.

✓ **Philistine Ploy.** Aaron, Rosenbaum. Good Biblical graphic adventure based on the *Book of Judges* features more than 80 screens, some animation. Knowledge of the Bible not necessary to solve. Davka, 845 N. Michigan Ave., #843, Chicago, IL 60611. \$34.95. 12/83.

Planetfall. Meretzky. A lovable robot steals the show in this science-fiction text adventure. Includes many outstanding puzzles, rich, colorful, intelligent text. Infocom, 55 Wheeler St., Cambridge, MA 02138. \$49.95. 8/83.

● **Prisoner 2.** Mullich, EduWare. Totally re-landscaped but loyal version of original game: full-color hi-res graphics added, puzzles reworded, obstacles expanded. Sophisticated and difficult exercise in intimidation with elements of satire. Escape from an island requires player to solve logical puzzles, overcome obstacles, and answer riddles. Excellent computer fare; nothing else like it. Peachtree Software, 3445 Peachtree Rd. N.E., #830, Atlanta, GA 30326. \$32.95. *The Prisoner*, 3/81; *Prisoner 2*, 10/82.

The Quest. Snell, Toler, Rea. As the king's newest advisor, you must accompany a champion on a dragon-slaying mission. Champion, parser accept advice in full and multiple sentences. Penguin, Box 311, Geneva, IL 60134. \$19.95. 9/83.

● **S.A.G.A. Series.** Adams. Scott Adams's prototypical adventures—12 in all—spruced up with 100-color graphics and Votrax vocals. Fun, not always logical, very story-oriented series. Each adventure has its own theme and often exotic locale. They map small but score big on imagination. Adventure International, Box 3435, Longwood, FL 32750. \$29.95 each. 7/82.

Shamus. Mataga. Try to penetrate The Shadow's lair in order to kill him in complex mystery maze game. Four levels, 32 rooms per level. Synapse Software, 5221 Central Ave., Richmond, CA 94804. \$34.95.

Suspended. Berlyn. Well-plotted adventure demands control of six independent robots who can act simultaneously. Intelligent, challenging exercise in logic. A milestone. Infocom, 55 Wheeler St., Cambridge, MA 02138. \$49.95. 4/83.

● **Swordthrust Series.** Set of adventures, seven so far, that integrate fantasy role playing. Create one character, make friends in each new adventure,

battle monsters and achieve goals together. Good stories, fun to map. Vocabulary no mystery, but puzzles are. Single character goes through all. CE Software, 801 73rd St., Des Moines, IA 50312. Number 1 prerequisite for rest. Each adventure, \$29.95. 8/82.

Transylvania. Antiochia. Some of best graphics ever in a hi-res adventure. Excellent puzzles and logic—no unfair tricks. Enjoyable. Penguin, Box 311, Geneva, IL 60134. \$19.95. 6/81.

Witness. Galley. Interactive mystery adventure set in 1938 reflects the style of pulp detective fiction popular then. Fun packaging and fun to play, although less complex than *Deadline*. A good step forward for an infant genre. Infocom, 55 Wheeler St., Cambridge, MA 02138. \$49.95. 7/83.

● **Zork I, II, III.** Blank, Lebling. Text lives! Three masterpieces of logic and grand adventure to revel in. Hard, logical puzzles with erudite parser that understands complete compound sentences and questions, has amazing vocabulary. *I* and *II* use standard scoring, standard goals; *III* has unique point system, and benevolence pays. Infocom, 55 Wheeler St., Cambridge, MA 02138. \$39.95. *Zork I*, 6/81; *Zork II*, 3/82; *Zork III*, 9/82.

Business

Accounting Plus II and IIe. *II* version is integrated package; general ledger, accounts receivable and payable, and inventory-purchasing modules. Menu-driven; prompting. *IIe* version is stripped and rebuilt to take advantage of available functions. Software Dimensions, 6371 Auburn Blvd., Citrus Heights, CA 95610. *II*, \$1,250; *IIe*, \$995.

Ana-List. Siddall, Poor. Easy-to-learn, no frills list processor prepares reports, automatically calculates numeric fields. Includes tabbed reference section, automatic top-of-page feed. User-customizable, compatible with *VisiCalc*. Synoptic Software, 57 Reservoir Ln., Chestnut Hill, MA 02167. \$150. 11/83.

Apple II Business Graphics. Converts numerical data into charts and graphs. Features mathematical and statistical functions. Requires 64K. Apple, 20525 Mariani Ave., Cupertino, CA 95014. \$175.

BPI System. Popular six-module business package; programs also available separately. Includes *General Ledger* (a bestseller), accounts receivable, accounts payable, payroll, inventory control, and job costing. Apple, 20525 Mariani Ave., Cupertino, CA 95014. \$395 each; job costing, \$595.

dBase II. Speedy relational database-management system. Requires SoftCard. Ashton-Tate, 9929 W. Jefferson Blvd., Culver City, CA 90230. \$700.

DB Master. Comprehensive database-management system with password protection, extensive report creation options. 1,000 characters per record. Stoneware, 50 Belvedere St., San Rafael, CA 94901. \$229. 10/81.

General Manager. Superb user-definable database management system; can use one to four disk drives or hard disk. Change screen and field formats without reentering data, expandable to *IIe* and 80 columns at no extra cost. Flexible, self-contained, and powerful. Quite simply the best non-CP/M database there is. Sierra On-Line, Sierra On-Line Building, Coarsegold, CA 93614. \$229.95. Hard-disk version, \$374.95. 11/83.

The Incredible Jack. Word processor, database, and spreadsheet, plus mailing label print and sort.

Though the quality of a program (a subjective judgment, to be sure) is important to consider when voting, the "best" program isn't necessarily the most popular. While someone might use a three hundred-dollar spreadsheet wonder program that does everything but fry eggs, that same person might rather be playing a cheaply made adventure game.

So, we're not asking you to vote for what you think were the ten best programs released in 1983, but rather for your favorite programs. There are spaces on the ballot for you to list your ten favorite programs in order of preference. It's important to list them in order, because votes will be weighted. That means a program receiving three first-place votes will carry more "weight" than a program receiving five tenth-place votes. Just because a program receives more votes doesn't mean it will win; high rankings also play a part.

There's another blank on the ballot; it's there for your favorite program of all time. Maybe it'll be the same as your favorite this year; maybe not. Maybe it'll be the same one you voted for last year; maybe not. *Wizardry* won last year as the favorite all-time program. Will it take the honors again? Or can something unseat the champ?

In addition to the voting, we're interested in hearing what you think about various programs—the dogs as well as the winners. Anybody with money can run a flashy ad campaign for a program—including full-color magazine ads that sing and dance about why you should buy the program—instead of telling you what it does. Reviews of programs don't always do justice to them—good or bad. Sometimes reviewers, in the opinion of the user, will completely miss the point or be so far off base that it looks like they took a bribe.

Or you may feel that one of your favorites is underrated. Tell us which programs you think ought to receive more applause and why. Software producers get some of their best input from polls like this. The readers speak, and the software makers listen.

Here's how the voting works.

Any program released between October 1, 1982, and December 31, 1983, are eligible for the voting. The reason for the overlap is to include programs that were released at the end of 1982 but weren't out long enough to be noticed by the consumer marketplace.

To make things easier for everyone, please use the enclosed ballot card that's obnoxiously sticking out between these pages. Just fill in your choices and drop it in the mailbox, postmarked by February 15, 1984.

Only one ballot per person can be accepted. If two or more ballots with the same votes are sent in by one person, only one will be counted. Ballots from the same person with different selections will fly straight into the nearest forest fire and be forgotten. Ballot-box stuffers, you have been warned!

If there are two or more persons in your household who want to vote, or if some overzealous voter already ripped the ballot from the magazine, then write your choices on a piece of paper with your name, address, and comments and send it to Softalk Vote, Box 7039, North Hollywood, CA 91605, postmarked by February 15, 1984.

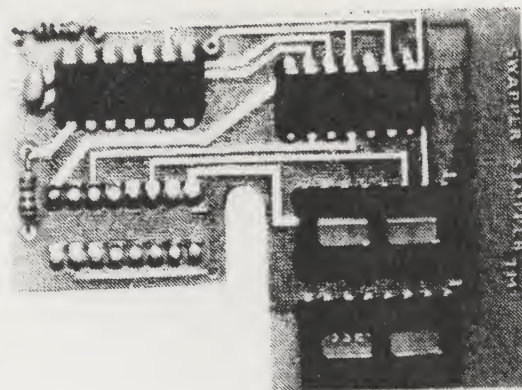
Votes will be counted by a privileged few on the *Softalk* staff. Nick and Bud's Accounting (est. 1983) will supervise to make sure there's no cheating (or ballot-box stuffing). The results will be locked safely away in *Softalk*'s safe-deposit cupboard, and the winner will be announced at the West Coast Computer Faire, where the author and publisher of the winning program will get all dressed up to receive the award for the Most Popular Program of 1983. If flying out to San Francisco just to find out who won doesn't sound inviting (it should, though), you can always read the results in the April issue.

Any professional software released between October 1, 1982, and January 1, 1983, is eligible for your vote. This list, made up of programs whose sales were trackable in the past year, is intended only as a memory jogger; it is not comprehensive—it's even possible that a package or two released before the eligible date could have snuck into the list; others may have been unwittingly omitted. Repeat: the programs you vote for need not be on this list. The list is *only* intended to get your memory jogging. Have fun reminiscing, and may the best product win!

A.E.
Airsim-3
Apple Cider Spider
Apple Writer IIe
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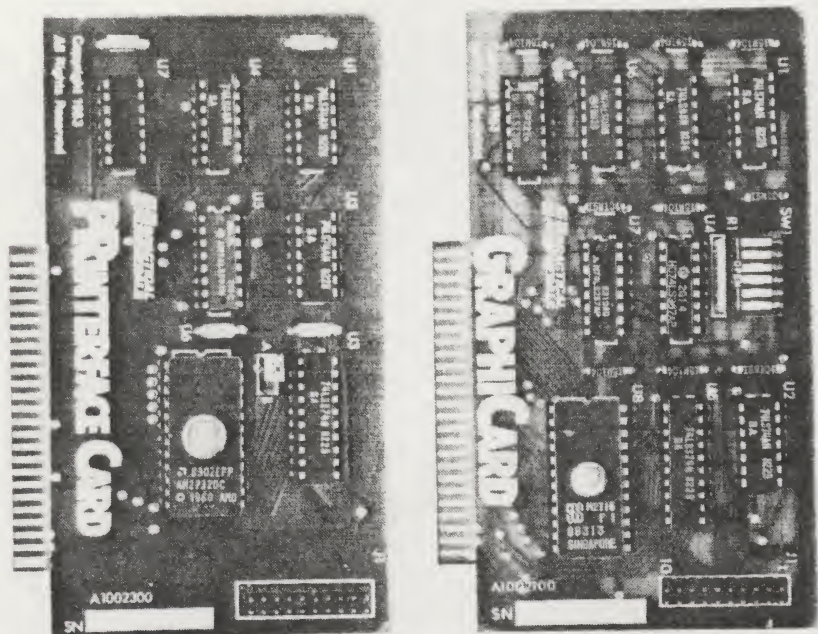
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- Bolo
- Bomb Alley
- Bouncing Kamungas
- Broadsides
- Briar Rose
- Canyon Climber
- Catalyst (III)
- Caverns of Callisto
- Caverns of Freitag
- Cdex Training for Apple IIe
- Cdex Training for VisiCalc
- Chequemate
- Chess 7.0
- Chivalry
- Computer SAT
- Conquering Worlds
- Coveted Mirror
- Crime Wave
- Critical Mass
- Cubit
- Dark Crystal
- Death in the Caribbean
- Delta Drawing
- Dino Eggs
- Dollars and Sense
- Doublestuff
- Double-Take
- Drol
- Eagles
- Early Games for Young Children
- Early Games Piece of Cake
- Einstein Compiler
- Enchanter
- Epidemic!
- Ernie's Quiz
- Evolution
- Exodus: Ultima III
- Facemaker
- Family Roots
- Fat City
- Fighter Command
- Flex Text
- Flip Out
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- Frame-Up
- Freefall
- Galactic Adventures
- Genesis
- Geopolitique 1990
- Germany 1985
- Gertrude's Puzzles
- Gnosis VII
- Gumball
- Hard Hat Mack
- Hayes Terminal Program
- Health-Aide
- High Rise
- Homeword
- Incredible Jack
- Infidel
- In Search of the Most Amazing Thing
- Instant Zoo
- InvisiCalc
- I. Q. Baseball
- Jawbreaker II
- Know Your Apple
- Know Your Apple IIe
- Labyrinth of Crete
- Last Gladiator
- Legacy of Llylgamyn
- Legionnaire
- Lexicheck IIe
- Lexicheck (III)
- Lode Runner
- Lunar Leeper
- Mad Rat
- Mask of the Sun
- Masquerade
- Math Maze
- Maze Craze Construction Set
- MegaWriter
- Microbe
- Micro Cookbook
- MicroCourier
- MicroTerminal II
- MicroTerminal III
- Miner 2049er
- Minit Man
- Missing Ring
- Mix & Match
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- Oil Barons
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- Parthian Kings
- Pascal Tutor
- Pen-Pal
- Pensate
- PFS:Write (IIe)
- PFS:Write (III)
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- Pinball Construction Set
- Planetfall
- Planetmaster
- Plato Fractions
- Portfolio
- Power of Words
- Pronto DOS
- Quest
- Quick File IIe
- Quick File III
- Reach for the Stars
- Repton
- Ringside Seat
- Rocky's Boots
- Routine Machine
- Sammy Lightfoot
- Sargon III
- Scaredy-Cat
- Serpent's Star
- S.E.U.I.S.
- Sherwood Forest
- Skyforth
- Snooper Troops II
- Softerm
- Space Station Zulu
- Space Vikings
- Spare Change
- Spitfire Simulator
- Spotlight
- Spy Strikes Back
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- Statpro
- Stellar 7
- Stickybear ABCs
- Stickybear Basketbounce
- Stickybear Numbers
- Story Machine
- Super Taxman II
- Suspended
- Think Tank
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- Troll's Tale
- Tubeway
- Type Attack
- Typefaces
- Ultima II
- Videx Preboot for Apple Writer
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- Wavy Navy
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- Word Attack!
- Word Juggler IIe
- Write Away
- Zaxxon
- Zork III

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Press

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AFTER WANDERING AROUND FOR WHAT SEEMS LIKE A LIFETIME, YOU FIND YOURSELF IN THE COMMUNICATIONS CENTER. UPON LOOKING AROUND FOR A WHILE, YOU ARRIVE AT THE CONCLUSION THAT THIS VITAL CENTER, LIKE ALL THE REST, IS DEAD. IN FACT, YOU'RE STARTING TO THINK OF YOURSELF IN THE SAME WAY.... DEAD. BUT NOT LIKE THE MILES UPON MILES OF UNCARING LIFELESS WIRES, TRANSISTORS, AND SUCH, BUT MUCH MORE PERSONALLY, MORE LIKE A COW BEING LED OFF TO THE SLAUGHTERHOUSE, A PIG STARING AT THE DESCENDING KNIFE, THE CHICKEN WAITING FOR THE AXE TO FALL. YEAH, THAT'S IT, THAT'S THE FEELING. DEAD MEAT ON THE HOOF. WAITING AROUND FOR THAT FATAL MISTAKE. NOT ONLY THAT, YOU'VE GOT A FEVER AND YOU'RE FEELING SICK TO YOUR STOMACH. 'JOIN THE STELLAR PATROL AND SEE THE UNIVERSE', THAT'S WHAT THE POSTER SAID. 'SCRUB YOUR WAY FROM ONE BORING SYSTEM TO THE NEXT' IS WHAT IT SHOULD HAVE SAID. "I WONDER IF I COULD SUE FOR FALSE ADVERTISING?" YOU MUSE. SUDDENLY YOU ARE INTERRUPTED....

"HI! FLOYD HERE, NOW! LET'S PLAY A GAME!" FLOYD YELLS, BOUNDING INTO THE ROOM.

("OH, GOD! NOT HIM AGAIN. GROAN.") "BEAT IT FLOYD, YA BOTHER ME, KID."

"NAW," FLOYD SAYS, "I JUST GOT THROUGH PLAYING BEAT IT. YOU ALWAYS WANT TO PLAY BEAT IT. FLOYD TIRED OF THAT GAME. LET'S PLAY HUCKA-BUCKA BEANSTALK!" (FLOYD HOPS AROUND IMPATIENTLY, HUMMING TUNELESSLY TO HIMSELF.)

"NO, FLOYD, NOT THAT! ANYTHING BUT THAT!"

"HIDER-SEEKER?" FLOYD WHINES PLAINTIVELY.

"OK, OK, YOU HIDE AND I'LL SEE IF I CAN FIND YOU WITHIN A WEEK OR TWO."

(FLOYD RAMBLES AROUND THE ROOM, LOOKING FOR A PLACE TO HIDE.)

"JEEZ, FLOYD, AT LEAST YOU COULD LOOK FOR A PLACE TO HIDE SOMEWHERE ELSE THAN IN FRONT OF ME, YA DUMMY!"

"YOU NOT FOOL FLOYD," FLOYD RETORTS, "IF FLOYD HIDE TOO FAR AWAY, YOU WOULD NOT SEEK FOR FLOYD, YOU WOULD CHANGE RULES TO 'BEAT IT' AGAIN."

"SIGH.... OK, FLOYD, OK."

(FLOYD RESUMES HIS SEARCH, THEN SUDDENLY DISAPPEARS!)

"HEY!!! WHERE'D HE GO? FLOYD? WHERE ARE YOU? FLOYD? YOU ALL RIGHT? FLOYD! F-L-O-Y-D!!! OLLY-OLLY-OXEN-FREE!!!"

(FLOYD BURSTS OUT FROM A HIDDEN NOOK OR CRANNY OR SOMESUCH.)

"FLOYD WIN! FLOYD WIN!" FLOYD SCREAMS AT THE TOP OF HIS LUNGS.

(FLOYD ABSENT-MINDEDLY SCRAWLS HIS NAME ON A BOOK OF SOME SORT HE IS HOLDING.)

YOU CAREFULLY CLIMB DOWN FROM THE TOP OF THE COMMUNICATIONS CONSOLE YOU SUDDENLY FOUND YOURSELF ON.

"YOU SCARED THE HOLY....WHAT'S THAT YOU'VE GOT THERE, FLOYD?"

"GOT WHAT, WHERE?" FLOYD SAYS, WHIPPING HIS HANDS BEHIND HIM.

"GIMME THAT!" YOU YELL, AS YOU DIVE OFF THE BOTTOM TIER OF THE CONSOLE AT FLOYD.

"EEEK!" SCREAMS FLOYD, AS HE SCRAMBLES OUT FROM UNDER YOU, DROPPING HIS POSSESSIONS IN THE PROCESS.

"OWWW!" YOU CRY, AS YOUR SHIN CRACKS AGAINST FLOYD AS HE TRY'S TO DODGE YOUR SUDDEN INEXPLICABLE ATTACK. YOU GRAB THE CRAYON AND THE BOOK, ALL THE WHILE SHAKING YOUR HEAD, TRYING TO CLEAR THE TEARS FROM YOUR EYES.

"OOOOOO! YOU PLAY ROUGH!" WHIMPERS FLOYD. "GIMME BACK MY CRAYON!!!" HE WAILS.

AS YOU TOSS THE CRAYON TO FLOYD, YOU NOTICE THE TITLE OF THE BOOK : 'CARE, MAINTENANCE, AND LOCATION OF THE 'ONE-TIME-ONLY' COMMUNICATIONS MANUAL OVERRIDE BUTTON'. FEVERISHLY (IN MORE WAYS THAN ONE), YOU OPEN THE 35 CHAPTER MANUAL AND BEGIN TO READ. YOU SKIP OVER THE CARE AND MAINTENANCE SECTIONS, AND FLIP RIGHT TO THE 'LOCATION' HEADING. NOT BEING A SPEED-READER IT TAKES YOU ALL OF 3.5 SECONDS TO READ THE TWO SHORT SENTENCES UNDER THAT HEADING.

STILL HALF-CRIPPLED BY YOUR "ACCIDENT" WITH ONE OF FLOYD'S HARDER PERMITTIES, YOU HOBBLE OVER TO A SMALL, UNOBTRUSIVE PANEL AND GINGERLY PUSH A HERETOFORE UNNOTICED BUTTON.

(WHIR-R-R, CLICK!)

THE WARNING LIGHT FLASHES ONCE, BLINDINGLY, THEN IS DARK. AN ENUNCIATOR PANEL FLASHES << EMURJUNCEE OVURIID - U GOT ABOUT THURTY SECCONS TU SEND YUR MESSIJ. >>

FEVERISHLY (AGAIN, IN MORE WAYS THAN ONE), YOU SIT AT THE CONSOLE AND BEGIN TO TYPE :

< STRANDED, REPEAT, STUCK IN UNKNOWN STAR SYSTEM. MADE PLANETFALL TWO DAYS AGO. NEED ASSISTANCE. REPEAT. HELP IS NEEDED TO SURVIVE!! REQUEST IMMEDIATE DELIVERY FROM THE CLOSEST STELLER PATROL SERVICE SHIP. CO-ORDINATES FOLLOW..(YOUR FINGERS FLASH ACROSS THE KEYS AS IF WITH A WILL OF THEIR OWN. YOU BARELY FINISH WHEN....) >

THE ENUNCIATOR FLASHES : << TIIMS UPP. WAYTING FORR REPLII. >>

THE ENUNCIATOR PANEL GOES DARK, AND THE WARNING LIGHT GOES BACK ON.

"BOY!" YOU MUTTER, "I SURE MISSPELLED A LOT OF WORDS. HOPE SOMEONE UNDERSTANDS WHAT I WAS SAYING." IN THE BACKGROUND, A PRINTER BURPS A PRINTOUT OF WHAT YOU HAVE JUST TYPED. FLOYD RUSHES OVER TO IT AND GRABS THE PRINTOUT BEFORE YOU CAN EVEN MOVE. AS YOU COIL YOURSELF FOR THE NEXT SPRING, YOU BEGIN TO JUDGE THE DISTANCES INVOLVED.....

FLOYD RUSHES OVER AND HANDS YOU THE PRINTOUT. YOU BEGIN TO UN-TENSE YOUR MUSCLES AS FLOYD WHINES, "WE BE FRIENDS, NOW? NOT JUMP ON FLOYD ANY MORE?" "OK, FLOYD, OK. TRUCE, HUH? BUDDIES, OK?"

FLOYD SHUDDERS WITH GRATITUDE AND SAYS, "GREAT! WANNA PLAY HUCKA-BUCKA INSTALK?"

IGNORING FLOYD, YOU READ THE MESSAGE YOU HAVE JUST SENT OUT INTO THE GALAXY, YOUR ONE AND ONLY HOPE FOR RESCUE.....

<...STUCK IN...PLANETFALL.....NEED...H.I.N.T.S.!!! REQUEST IMMEDIATE DELIVERY FROM THE CLOSEST...SERVICE. CO-ORDINATES FOLLOW..>

IT IS THEN THAT YOU UNDERSTAND THAT YOU ARE TRULY DOOMED. YOUR MESSAGE DIDN'T GET THROUGH (PERHAPS YOU SHOULD HAVE PAID MORE ATTENTION TO THE 'CARE AND MAINTENANCE PART OF THE MANUAL'). (MEANWHILE, FLOYD NONCHALANTLY SINGS THE DEATH SCENE FROM "CARMEN".)

"MAYBE I'LL JUST THROW MYSELF INTO THE SEA," YOU MUTTER, AS YOU WANDER AIMLESSLY OUT OF THE ROOM.

(FLOYD ABSENTLY RECITES THE FIRST 24 HINTS FROM ZORK I : THE GREAT UNDERGROUND EMPIRE.)

AS YOU WANDER OFF, LOOKING FOR A WORKING LASER WITH WHICH TO BLOW OUT YOUR BRAINS, THE PRINTER BURPS AGAIN, AND A SMALL ENUNCIATOR PANEL DISPLAYS : < EMURGENCEE OVURRIID MESSIJ REESEED. > FOR A FEW SECONDS.

FLOYD BOUNDS OVER TO THE PRINTER, GRABS THE PRINTOUT, AIMS HIS OCULARS AT THE PAPER AND READS : 'AS PER YOUR INSTRUCTIONS, HERE ARE YOUR HINTS FOR PLANETFALL (MAP INCLUDED). IF YOU EVER NEED OUR SERVICE AGAIN, JUST LET US KNOW. (IN THE MEANTIME, PLEASE LEARN HOW TO SPELL AND USE PUNCTUATION. YOUR MESSAGE WAS ALMOST UNREADABLE.)' YOURS TRULY, BROKEN TIMBER / BRASS LANTERN PRESS.

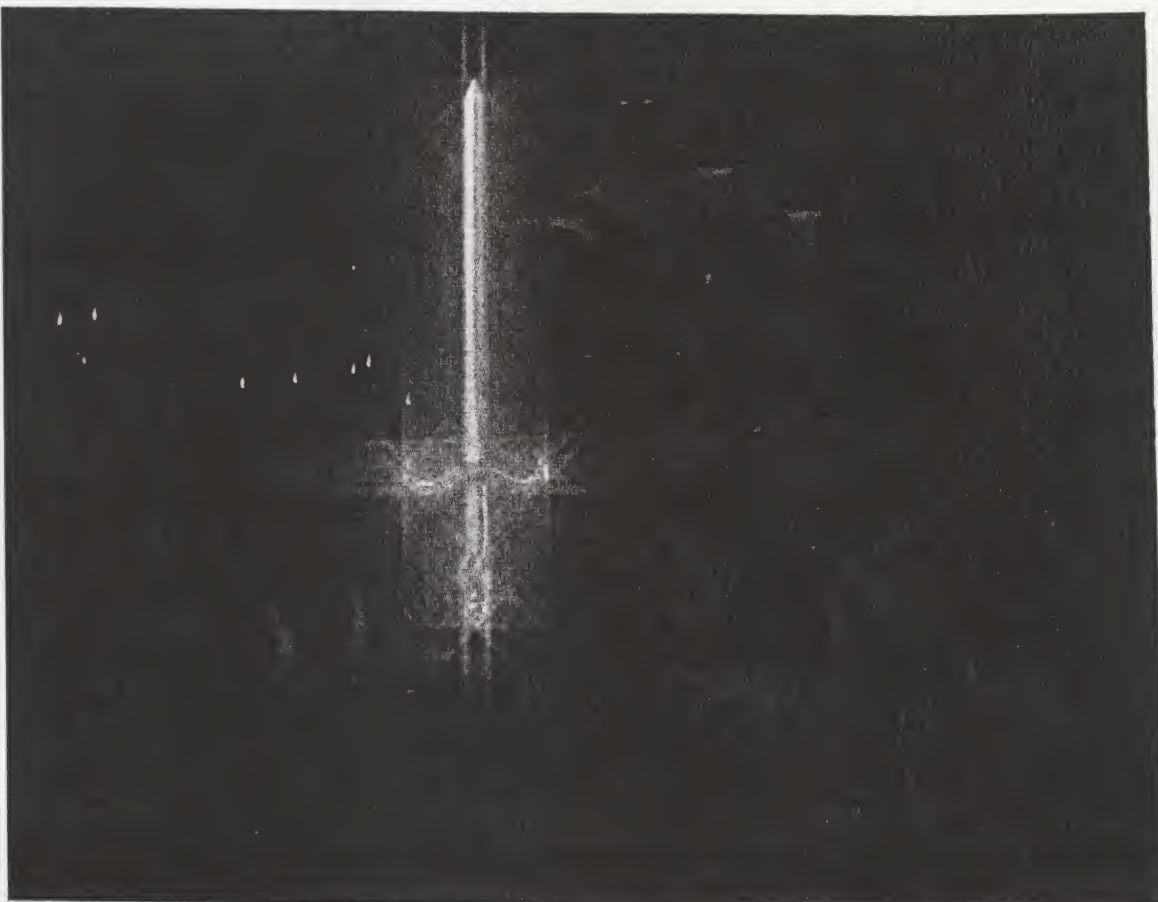
FLOYD READS ON FOR A MOMENT, SCANNING THE ENTIRE DOCUMENT IN SOMEWHAT LESS THAN 3.5 SECONDS. HE THEN LET'S OUT A GIANT "WHOO!!" AND TEARS OUT OF THE ROOM AT TOP SPEED YELLING AT THE TOP OF HIS INTERNAL OXYGEN BELLOWS, "HEY, HUMAN, LET'S PLAY A NEW GAME! IT'S A GUESSING GAME! HERE'S ONE..HOW DO YOU GET THE BRASS LANTERN FROM THE RADIATION LAB?" HE RUSHES ON, SECURE IN THE KNOWLEDGE THAT AT LAST, HE HAS A GAME THAT WILL INTEREST YOU.....

Shannara

Legend brings the novels of Terry Brooks to life in their latest epic adventure

The *Shannara* novels by Terry Brooks are the best-selling fantasy books in the world, and *Legend Entertainment* has them. Sierra's *Quest for Glory* series of games, designed by the award winning tandem of Corey and Lori Cole, were particularly popular with both the adventure and role-playing crowds, and *Legend* has them, too. The end result? *Shannara*, the game, which sports *Legend's* highest budget to date.

Your first evidence of the improved budget is the visuals. The only fantasy game as good-looking is *Legend's* last adventure, *Death Gate*. By sticking with a hand-drawn style of art (particularly appropriate for the genre), *Legend* avoids the problems other companies have faced when



using digitized video. The game features a score by the Fatman, full digital voice acting and *Legend's* usual icon-based interface; however, what you really want to know about is the story, right?

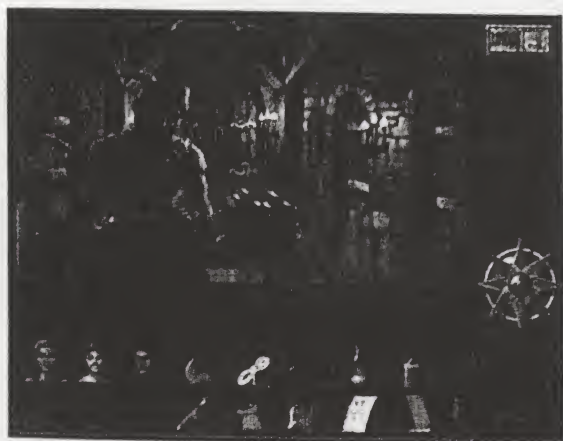
The thickening plot

The story of *Shannara* is new, and set in the world developed by Brooks in the novels. It takes place in the missing generation between the books, and will feature characters familiar to readers of the series (familiarity with the books will not be required to play the game, however). Brendel, Balinor, Allanon and others make sustained appearances.

The main plot of the story concerns Brona, who in *Sword of Shannara* was killed. He's resurrected by a Gnome Shaman, Brona's zealous follower. Once back, Brona is stronger than ever, and now seeks revenge on the people who killed him. To guarantee his survival he destroys the

only thing which can destroy him – the *Sword of Shannara*. He casts a spell that destroys the sword. The sword, which wasn't used to slay Brona but possesses the power to show the wielder the truth of their life (Brona couldn't deal with it), will need to be reassembled in order for Brona to be sent back.

Unfortunately it won't be as easy as "find the pieces of the sword and go to the local blacksmith." As Jak Ohmsford, the son of the original slayer of Brona, Shea Ohmsford, you will not only have to recover the pieces, but Allanon informs you that you will also need a magic item from each of the different races (your basic elves, trolls, dwarves and such) to put the sword back together. Not only do you need the items, but you'll also have to enlist a companion from each race to assist you. You will have to mend old wounds as well as convince your potential companions that they need to accompany you on your journey in order to defeat Brona and restore the sword.



The Conspirators

Terry Brooks grew up surrounded by the printed word, which eventually bore fruit first at Hamilton College in Clinton, New York, in the form of an English Degree; later while practicing law he was able to complete an epic fantasy, *The Sword of Shannara*. It was published in 1977, and became the first work of fiction ever to crack *The New York Times* trade paperback bestseller list. By 1986, Brooks was so successful he gave up law to become a full-time writer.

Brooks followed *The Sword of Shannara* with *The Elfstones of Shannara* and *The Wishsong of Shannara*. The prolific Brooks has also authored the *Magic Kingdom* series, which includes *The Tangle Box*, *Magic Kingdom For Sale-Sold!*, *The Black Unicorn* and *Wizards at Large*. The 90's saw Brooks return to *Shannara* with *The Heritage of Shannara* series, which consists of

The Scions of Shannara, *The Druid of Shannara*, *The Elf Queen of Shannara* and *The Talismans of Shannara*. His most recent novel is *Witches Brew*, released in April of 1995, and marks a return to the *Magic Kingdom* series.

Corey and Lori Cole are best known for their work with Sierra on the *Quest for Glory* series. In addition to these titles, they have also collaborated on *The Castle of Dr. Brain* and *Mixed-Up Fairy Tales*. Corey is a recovered professional programmer (networking, desktop publishing and word processing) and has written several scenarios for pen-and-paper role-playing games. He is handling most of the programming chores on *Shannara*. Lori is writing most of the dialogue for the games, and is directing the art production.

Legend Entertainment first crawled out from under a rock called *Infocom* in 1989, they were founded by ex-*Infocom*ie Bob Bates (who had designed *Sherlock* and *Arthur*) and Mike Verdu (*Gateway*). Their earliest titles included

Steve Meretzky's *Spellcasting* games, as well as Bob's own *TIMEQUEST*, which was sadistically hard (something Bob gleefully admits). In addition to the Coles, their stable of designers includes Meretzky, who still shows up from time to time to work on something like *Superhero League of Hoboken*, Glen Dahlgren, master of laser tag and designer of *Death Gate* and the upcoming game based on the novels of Robert Jordan, Josh Mandel, the ex-Sierra yuckster responsible for *Freddy Pharkas* and *Space Quest 6* and the man who will be responsible for dropping us off at *Callahan's Crosstime Saloon*, and Michael Lindner, who designed *Companions of Xanth* and is currently working on *Star Control III*. In 1994, *Legend* partnered up with *Random House*, which has given them access to all of these licenses, and should mean that your favorite fantasy or science-fiction writer may one day find their name emblazoned on a *Legend* product.



Quest for combat

Perhaps stealing a page from their own **Quest for Glory** series of games, the Coles have included combat in **Shannara**, but they've done it in such a way that the player should not seek out combat as a means of improving their characters. On the contrary, combat should be avoided; you can die from it. Those who die in combat still stand a chance of being aligned with Bona.

Which brings us to "the Floyd Moment." Say what? What's that, you may ask? It's that moment in a game where you suddenly feel a slight tug at your heart about the choices you've made in the game. The origin of the term is Steve Meretzky's brilliant **Planetfall**, where you send the robot Floyd to his death in order to save yourself.

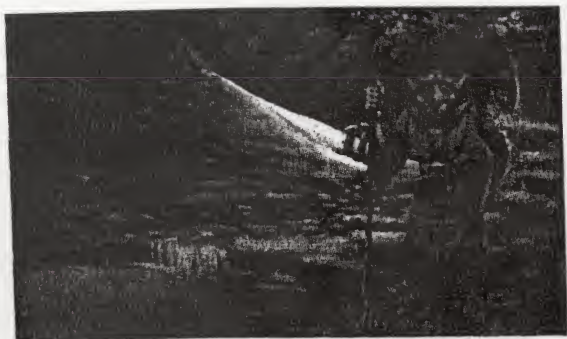
Shannara possesses such a moment; whether or not *Legend* can pull it off will depend on how well they manage to envelop the player in the world of **Shannara**. At one point in the game the player will be faced with a



choice they may not want to have to make – and the choice here can have serious repercussions later on in the story. The end result of this is to show you that being a hero isn't all it's cracked up to be. There's no glory in saving the world – just a lot of hard work and the possibility of death at every turn.

Legend has a reputation for producing the most literary adventure games on the market, with detailed plots, believable characters and interesting events. If **Shannara** is successful at adding that emotional element, look for it to be one of the brightest stars this holiday season.

◆ Steve Bauman



Down the road...

Callahan's Crosstime Saloon

Callahan's Crosstime Saloon, due in the middle of 1996, is a game based on Spider Robinson's series of extremely popular (and incredibly well-written) novels. Designed by Josh Mandel, who's more known for light-hearted fare like **Freddy Pharkas** and **Space Quest 6**, Callahan may surprise some gamers by taking on the darker edge of the novels.

The hedonistic bar is the setting for the novels, time and place Long Island, New York, present day. So how is this spacey? The humans who hang out there are all a bit odd – some are psychic, others possess advanced skills. The bar is also frequented by aliens, who for whatever reason aren't bothered in this place.

As with most bars, a series of regulars drop in to pour out their hearts to Callahan, the owner of the bar. People walk in and say things like, "Oh, the world is going to end tomorrow," and the people of the bar get together and solve the problem. That's the basic format of the books, and the game will follow suit. There are currently 10 sub-stories the player will have to deal with, all of which begin and end at the bar.

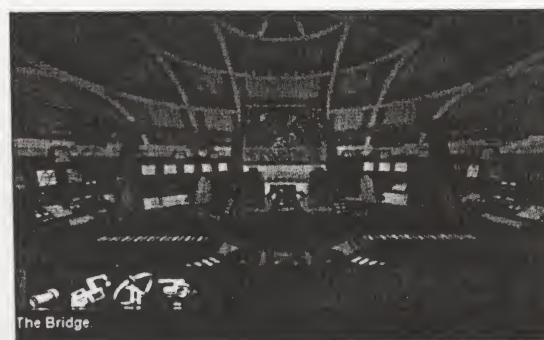
What may set the game apart is that it's more about characters than locations and puzzle solving. Real people with real problems. That's the theme of the game. It sounds really interesting, and we'll be sure to keep you posted about further developments.

Wheel of Time

Glen Dahlgren is the man responsible for bringing Robert Jordan's epic *Wheel of Time* series of novels to a computer near you (the game will not be called **Wheel of Time**). It's the biggest project *Legend* has ever done, and they're pulling out all the stops for it. First, the technical design of the game is a radical departure from previous *Legend* titles. The game will be entirely 3D (like **Under a Killing Moon**) and will run in Windows. It will utilize motion capture for characters and combat, featuring what sounds like an incredibly innovative combat system based on, of all things, current fighting games. Visually, *Legend* are going for an immersive 3D game featuring a graphic look that's not reality-based but instead looks like the hand-drawn art of **Death**.

The world will be alive, with people going about their daily routines whether you're present or not. You will control the Dragon reborn (something fans of the series will understand). The Dark One, who was put away by the original Dragon, escapes and the reborn Dragon will defeat him. The story is incredibly detailed and would take an entire article just to sketch out.

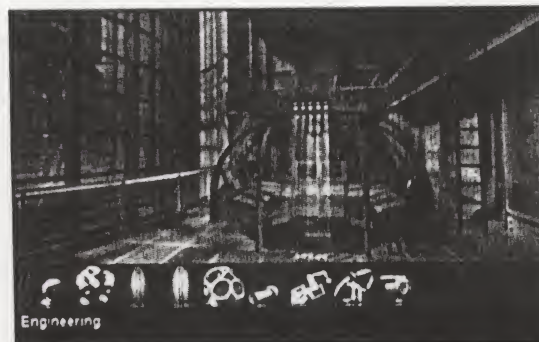
Glen is a very opinionated guy. He's taken a look at all of the 3D designs and analyzed everything right and wrong about them. He has some great ideas, and his design for **Wheel of Time** is wildly ambitious. We won't see it until late 1996.



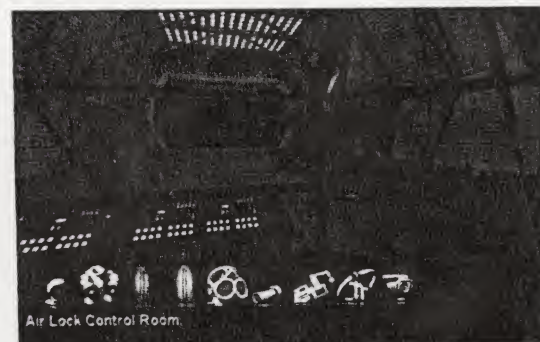
Mission Critical

Mike Verdu's **Mission Critical**, which should be released "any day now," is an epic space adventure offering a diverse and exciting challenge for adventurers of all levels. Verdu is knowledgeable about hard science, and is thus interested in constructing plausible science fiction.

The game will feature Michael Dorn (*Star Trek: The Next Generation*) and Patricia Charbonneau (*RoboCop II*). Full-motion video is present, but *Legend* is quick to point out that it's there mainly to supplement the game.



MC concerns itself with questions about the nature of humanity. Its setting is outer space; the player is the only survivor on a ship after a battle. Dorn and Charbonneau had planned your survival, and will lead you along to the completion of your first task, which will be to get the ship running. Once it's ready, you'll be attacked by an alien fleet and be forced to defend yourself. The combat segments, which have drawn a few concerned letters from readers, is not a twitchy-arcade game grafted into an adventure but rather a strategic game which starts out easy and gradually gets more difficult.



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good science fiction comedy adventure game by
Infocom." And as if that weren't enough, it also
"Green Bay over Cleveland, +5," —but for

THE UNIVERSE

interested in good science fiction, comedy, adventure, or games by Infocom, and says, "Here is a good science fiction comedy adventure game by Infocom." And as if that weren't enough, it also allegedly says, "Green Bay over Cleveland, +5," and "Bluebottle in the fourth at Saratoga"—but for that, we only have the word of certain extremely sharp-eared Venusian bookies.

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Infocom game players aren't your ordinary computer game purchasers. According to Doctor E. L. Twitch of the Jovian Research Committee on Humanoid Psychology, they are "intelligent, affluent, intensely brand-loyal customers, driven by forces far beyond their comprehension to buy one Infocom game after another, and awaiting the introduction of each new Infocom game with demons of mad desire howling in their souls.... In the advanced stages, they become evangelical, exhorting friends and family to join with them in succumbing to Infocomania...."

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